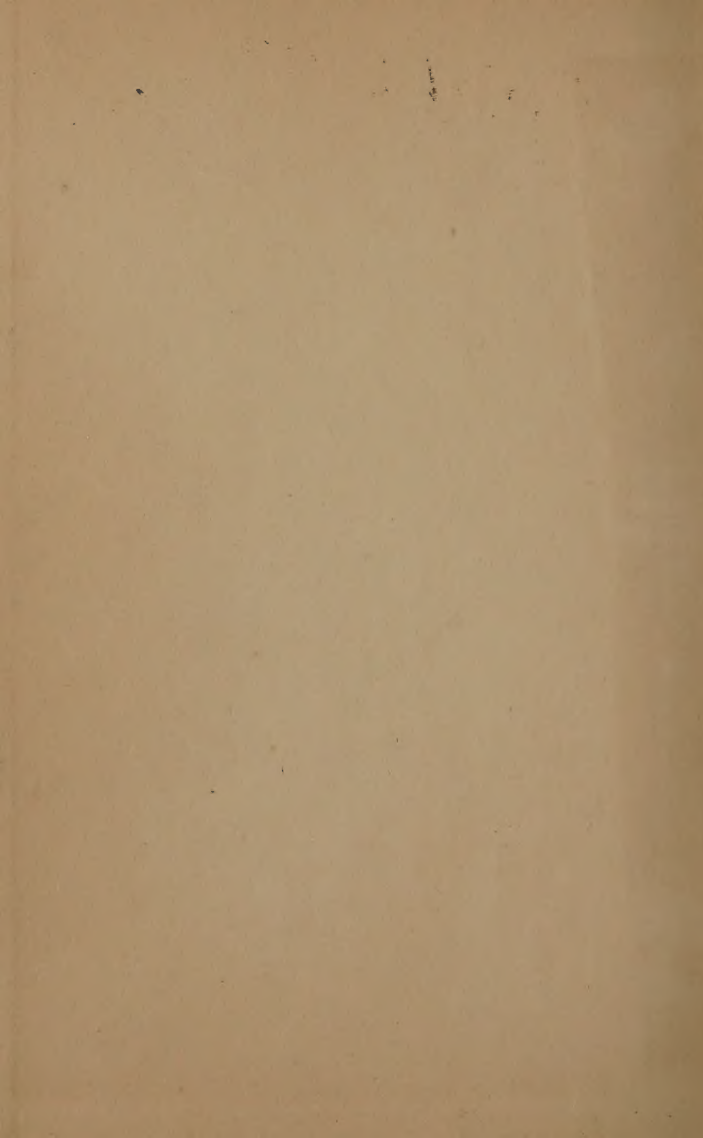


MISS BETTY NEW YORK



ELLEN DOUGLAS DELAND



MISS BETTY OF NEW YORK

BY
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AUTHOR OF
"A LITTLE SON OF SUNSHINE"
"OAKLEIGH" ETC.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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I

“**N**OW, remember, Christopher. Ten blocks down and then turn and walk back. Don't leave Madison Avenue. Straight down and straight back. You understand?”

“Oh yes, I understand, grandfather.”

“I feel strongly inclined to send Thomas with you.”

“Oh, grandfather! Please, *please* don't. Please let me go alone! I can perfectly well. I will do just as you say, only I do so want to go alone!”

“I cannot imagine why. Thomas could walk behind you. Surely you do not dislike Thomas?”

“Oh no! I like him. But I do want to go alone. And you said I could, grandfather. You promised.”

“So I did. Well, go.”

In a moment the front door closed and Chris-

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topher Lovel started on his first walk alone in the streets of New York.

He was a boy of eleven or twelve years old, and he lived with his grandfather, General Baldwin Keith. His father and mother were dead, and he had no other near relatives. He had not always lived with his grandfather. In fact, until the preceding summer he had not even known him, for the General had not approved of his daughter's marriage, and during Christopher's early childhood he had not even seen him. Now, however, he loved him dearly, and with such strength of affection that he would scarcely allow him out of his sight. The boy was lame, and this fact made the grandfather still more careful of him. But as he walked down Madison Avenue, except for the fact that he carried a cane, his lameness was scarcely noticeable. He had been injured by an accident several years ago, but the crutches which he had been obliged to use were now no longer necessary, and no one would have imagined that the boy had but one leg.

He was a tall boy, but with a face that was singularly childlike for one of his age. His hair was fair and his eyes were blue, and their expression was so friendly, his face so sunny, that more than one person who passed him turned to look at him a second time.

It was a beautiful day in early spring. There

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had been rain during the night, but now the sun was shining, and in the parks and squares the grass had turned green, and small beginnings of buds could be discovered on trees and bushes. A long double procession of carriages, automobiles, and wagons passed up and down the avenue, with the rumble and roar that are never absent from the streets of New York. On the sidewalks there was another double procession of persons walking, though not in such close ranks. But there was life and movement everywhere, and Chris rejoiced in being part of it.

"I wish I could meet Betty Hamilton," he thought. "Oh, I just wish I could meet her, or see her in a window or something! She lives on Madison Avenue; I remember that. I suppose grandfather knows the number, but if I had asked him what it was he would have told me I couldn't go there. It is so funny grandfather doesn't like to have me go with other children. I do wish I could find Betty, though. I'll ask Cousin Ludovic when I see him."

As if in answer to his thought, a girl came running across the street from the opposite side of the way, dodging beneath horses' heads, and behind and in front of puffing automobiles, in a manner only possible to a resident of New York. She was followed by an elderly woman, whose face wore an expression of protest, although she

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was too far behind for her words to be heard above the din of traffic. The girl was about eleven or twelve years old—in fact, just the age of Christopher. She, too, was tall and very straight, and her hair, which was rather short, was red and curly. She dashed across the street, stopped short directly in front of Christopher, and seized both of his hands in her own.

“Chris Lovel!” she cried. “Where did you come from? And were you coming to see me? And where are your crutches? Don’t you need crutches any more?”

“Oh, Betty!” said Chris. For a moment it was all he could say. He was so glad to see her that it made him feel dumb. But Betty had voice and words enough for both.

“I saw you from the other side of the way, and I could scarcely believe my eyes. It didn’t seem as if it could be you without crutches. How do you manage?”

But before he could reply the elderly woman, who had pursued Betty across the street, had joined them.

“It’s a wonder you were not run over, Miss Betty,” she said, severely, “dashing across in the most crowded place like that. And who is this, if you please?”

“Why, it’s Chris Lovel! You know who he is. He was at Maybury last summer. Chris, this is

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Gertrude. She's walking home from school with me, and she hates so to cross anywhere but at crossings that she's cross. See?"

Both children laughed, and Chris looked up into Gertrude's worthy German face with so friendly an expression that her own relaxed and she smiled, too, at Betty's joke.

"Come along to our house," said Betty. "Were you coming there, anyway?"

"I didn't know which it was," replied Chris, "but I've been looking at all these houses and wishing I knew, or that I could see you, and then you came running over. My grandfather lives on this street, too."

"Oh yes, I know the house. Everybody knows General Keith's house, it is so big and grand. It has seemed so funny all winter, Chris, whenever I passed there coming home from school, to think you would be living there. Uncle Ludovic told me you were coming home from abroad, but he said you were going right up to Maybury."

"So we are soon. We only got here day before yesterday. I hope we shall stay here awhile. I like New York better than Europe. It is so gay, and there's such a blue sky, and the sun shines so much more."

"Here is our house. Can't you come in and see my dog? And perhaps mamma is at home."

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"I don't know whether grandfather would like it," said Christopher, hesitating at the foot of the steps while Betty ran up and pulled the bell.

"Oh, why not? Why, we are almost your relations, now that my aunt Edith has married your cousin Ludovic. Your grandfather couldn't possibly object to your knowing us."

"Oh, I didn't mean that, but you see—" He hesitated again. He did not wish to tell Betty that this was the first time he had been to walk alone. It seemed so very babyish. If only his grandfather would treat him more like a big boy! However, there was no help for it. He must explain. "You see, I don't usually go out alone. My grandfather thinks I can't find my way, so he said I could only walk ten blocks down and then turn and go back."

"That's all right, then," cried Betty. "We're only eight blocks down from your house, and coming in won't count for anything. You've just got to turn and go back when you come out. Oh, come along in!"

Thus urged, Christopher followed her up the steps and into the house, for the door had now been opened. A little brown Boston terrier with a snub nose and big brown eyes rushed to greet Betty, and included Christopher in his welcome, much to the boy's delight.

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"His name is Brownie," said Betty, "and he is a very dear dog, and hardly ever does any mischief. Only once in a while he runs off with Florence's slipper or gloves or something. Florence is my grown-up sister. She is out in society this winter, so she thinks she has to be very dignified and high and mighty about her things, and Brown just loves to tease her. So do I, and I get lots of chances, for she is the kind of person you can tease very easily. Let's go up-stairs now. I'll show you our play-room. We children have a place all to ourselves, and Charles and Pauline are both out now, so there won't be anybody there."

"Are they your brother and sister?" asked Chris, as they mounted two long flights of stairs and walked through a passageway to a large, sunny room on the front of the house.

"Yes, and you can be perfectly thankful you are the only one, or at least not the youngest. Charles and Pauline think just because they are older than I am they can do just what they like. That's Charles's railroad you are looking at. He won't allow any one to touch it. He is inventing something. That is Pauline's corner over there where the desk is. Pauline writes poetry, so she has to have the desk. You may be perfectly thankful you haven't a brother who is an inventor and a sister who is a poetess, Chris."

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"Are your brother and sister really that?"

His interest was plainly evident. What if he should admire such eccentric individuals! Such a thought was not to be tolerated for a moment.

"Yes, I'm sorry to say they are, and it is not at all convenient. They are just absorbed in their own pursuits."

"You are just as wonderful as ever," said Christopher. "You use such beautiful, long words. You must be a very remarkable family."

"Well, I suppose we are," returned Betty, complacently. "But you will soon get to know us all very well, for we are all going to be at Maybury this summer. My father has bought an old farm-house there. But you will always have me for your most intimate friend in the family, won't you, Chris? Promise me that. I know you will find I am more congenial than an inventor or a poetess."

He was delighted to promise it. He had never liked any one of his own age as much as Betty. He had many friends among older people, but Betty stood alone as the most fascinating, the most bewitching of children.

"I like you better than any person I know who is under fourteen," said he. "I shall be very glad to have you for my most intimate friend."

"All right," said Betty, "and you shall be mine—while I am at Maybury. Of course, away

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from there—here in New York, I mean—there are lots of girls, and boys, too, as to that, who are very intimate friends of mine. You couldn't expect me to put you ahead of them all the year round."

"No," said Christopher politely, but sadly, "I suppose not."

There was an instant's pause. "Does Rachel Amy Martin live at Maybury now?" asked Betty.

"Oh yes."

"Is she under fourteen?"

"Oh no. Going on fifteen, I think."

"Then she might—" But before Betty could finish her sentence her mother came into the room. "Oh, mamma, this is Chris Hamilton! Don't you know, he was at the Toppan Farm last summer and found his grandfather so unexpectedly? And wasn't it funny: I just happened to see him on the other side of the street when I was coming home from school!"

Mrs. Hamilton greeted the boy kindly and cordially. She looked with interest at the grandson of General Keith, of whom she had heard so much.

"We did not know you were in New York," she said. "Has your grandfather opened his house?"

"Yes. We haven't been there long, and it is such a great big house I don't like it very much.

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I must go back now, or he will think I have lost my way. I am so glad I met Betty."

"Can't you stay and see her a little while? We will telephone your grandfather and tell him where you are, if you think he will be anxious."

"Grandfather hasn't a telephone. He doesn't like them. We play the violin a good deal, and he thinks the telephone would always be ringing when he wanted to play. He doesn't like to be interrupted. I think I must go now, but I should like to come again and see Betty if he will let me."

"Couldn't you come to luncheon with us tomorrow? We have it at half-past one, and I shall be very glad to see you. Will you tell your grandfather so? Perhaps he will not be sorry to have you come where there are some other children."

"I don't think grandfather cares anything about that," said Christopher, looking up at her with his frank blue eyes. "He would rather have me stay with him. He wouldn't let me go with any children when we were travelling. Up at Maybury I only go to Toppan Farm to see Mr. and Mrs. Toppan, and they are grown up, and I go there because they are the ones who really found me."

"Then you don't go with Rachel Amy Martin?" asked Betty.

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"No, I don't see her very often."

"It's splendid that you don't have to use crutches any more," said Betty; "but do you always have to carry that cane?"

The boy's face saddened. Then the color spread over it and his eyes kindled. He spoke with eagerness. "Not always, and I sha'n't have to very long. And it's better than crutches. When I first began to use crutches I thought they were grand, and now I think my new leg is grand. You would hardly know it isn't a real live leg, would you?"

"I'd never know it at all."

"I'm so glad!"

Presently he had said good-bye and was walking up Madison Avenue, going as rapidly as possible, for he was quite sure his grandfather must already be anxious about him.

II

CHRISTOPHER felt very happy himself, even though his grandfather might be displeased with him. He had seen again and had talked with Betty Hamilton, and if his grandfather would only give him permission he was to take luncheon at her house to-morrow. He was not at all sure that General Keith would be willing, but at least he had the hope. And even if he could not go, he could rejoice in the thought of having seen Betty and having found that she had not forgotten him and was "just as nice as ever."

And they were coming to Maybury for the summer! He hoped with all his heart that his grandfather would not object to his playing with her occasionally, and perhaps with her brothers and sisters and cousins. Chris had not a very clear idea of how many there were. He thought of Betty as a fascinating and fortunate young person, surrounded by a large circle of admiring and affectionate relatives, all eager to do just as she wished, and all loving her better than they could possibly love any one else—for surely there

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could be no one in the world more worthy of affectionate admiration than Betty Hamilton.

Christopher had very few relatives; his grandfather, a great-aunt, and some grown-up second cousins were the extent of his family. Until less than a year ago he had not known even of them. He had supposed himself to be an orphan with no kindred. Then, by a strange combination of circumstances, it had been discovered that he was the grandson of General Keith, and from being a poor and homeless little boy he had suddenly become a person of importance, the idol of his grandfather, and in all probability the heir of his wealth, although that part of it had not as yet occurred to Christopher. Since then his life had been totally different from all that had gone before. Part of the time had been passed at Maybury, where General Keith owned a large and beautiful estate, and part in travelling, for early in the winter the old man had become restless, and with sudden determination went abroad, taking Christopher with him, and his faithful man Thomas. That Chris was lame was a never-failing source of sorrow to General Keith. It was said by those who knew the proud old General that he blamed himself for it. Had he not refused to pardon his daughter for marrying against his wishes, the little boy would never have been injured; for he was playing his violin in the street

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for money when the accident happened which cost him his leg.

When the boy reached home the door was opened immediately by a man who seemed to have been watching for him.

"Oh, Master Christopher," he said, in a tone of relief, "I am very glad you've come! The General is worried to death."

"But why, Thomas? He told me I could go to walk."

"Yes, Master Christopher, but you've been gone longer than the General thought you'd ought to be. He—"

Thomas paused abruptly, for a voice was heard calling from up-stairs.

"Is that you, Christopher?"

"Yes, grandfather," the boy shouted, in his cheerful young voice—a sharp contrast to the querulous old tones that summoned him.

"Why don't you come up at once? And why did you not tell me, Thomas, the moment he arrived? Such negligence is—"

"Oh, grandfather, Thomas didn't have time! I've just this second come in. Here I am," he continued, pulling himself up the stairs by the balusters. "I've had such fun! I've found Betty, grandfather—Betty Hamilton, you know; Cousin Edith's niece. She was up at Maybury

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at the Toppan Farm last summer, and I didn't suppose I'd ever see her again."

"I don't know why not, if she is your cousin Edith's niece. I should suppose it the most natural thing to expect—that you should eventually meet her again. So that is what detained you! I wish, Christopher, that you would remember how anxious I must necessarily be when you are absent so long. I told you, I think, ten blocks down should be the limit of your walk."

"And so it was, grandfather. The Hamiltons live just eight blocks and a half from here. I counted very carefully. I saw Betty in the street, and it was such good luck! I am sorry you were worried, but I didn't know I was gone too long."

He had slipped his hand into his grandfather's, and together they walked into the library—a large front room, from the windows of which the General had been watching, moving from one to the other in restless impatience, and from there to the head of the stairs to listen. He looked down at the boy beside him now, and his stern face grew more tender. It was easy to see that all the affection he was capable of feeling was given to his grandson. Chris glanced up fearlessly and talked with perfect freedom. There were very few persons who did not regard General Keith with awe, and many who disliked him; but he

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and Christopher had been on terms of friendship since the beginning of their acquaintance, before they knew of the close relationship existing between them, and their life together had only served to strengthen this feeling. Christopher's faith in the love and goodness of others, a faith which he was unconscious of, but which was one of the strongest traits in his character, invariably served to awaken the love and goodness which, although it may long lie dormant, is hidden somewhere beneath the coldest, the most unpromising exterior. It never occurred to him that people would regard him with indifference or dislike, and so they rarely did. There is profound truth in the saying that we usually find what we look for in the attitude of our fellow-beings toward ourselves.

They seated themselves in their customary places, the General in a large leather arm-chair which stood by the library table, Christopher in a smaller arm-chair which faced the other. Sitting thus they carried on many conversations, and wherever they chanced to be staying two chairs were invariably arranged for them to occupy in this manner.

"Now, sir, give an account of yourself." The words were harsh, and so was the tone, and so was the face—except for the eyes; they rested on the boy with immense love in their gaze.

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"Well, I was so surprised to see Betty! She came running across the street to speak to me, and we were near her house; and when we got there she wanted me to go in, and I thought I would. You see, I hadn't seen her for almost a year—and she is the most splendid girl, grandfather! She knows more games than anybody I ever knew except Agnes, a girl I knew at the Home. She—"

"Never mind about Agnes at the Home. I have often told you that part of your life must be forgotten."

"I can't exactly forget, grandfather, for you know they were my friends. I should hate to forget friends. Shouldn't you? But, of course, I don't have to talk about them if you would rather I didn't."

"Go on with your account of to-day. I suppose this Betty is a daughter of Charles Hamilton. You say she is a niece of Ludovic's wife. I remember she was at Maybury with her aunt. A very mischievous young person. Charles Hamilton's daughter, of course."

"I don't know her father's name, but she has a brother Charles. I've never seen him, but Betty has talked about him a lot. And she has a mother—oh, such a beautiful mother, grandfather!" The boy leaned back in his chair and sighed heavily. "It must be a perfectly won-

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derful thing always to have a mother who looks like that."

"I didn't know Charles Hamilton married a beauty."

"It isn't that she is so pretty, but she looked so—oh, so kind! I do love people like that." He paused, and his face grew tender. It was a face which changed with the passing thoughts. He was thinking of his own mother, whom he could scarcely remember. Indeed, all that he could recall was the way in which she had kissed him. He did not speak of this now. He had discovered long ago that his grandfather did not care to have him talk about his mother, although she had been his only daughter.

General Keith, guessing his thought, urged him to continue his story. "What else happened?" he asked.

"Well, they asked me to come to lunch to-morrow, grandfather. Do you think you could possibly allow me to go? I want to so very much."

General Keith was silent for a moment. Then he turned abruptly away from the eager blue eyes. He took up a book that was lying on the table beside him.

"We start for Maybury to-morrow," he said, rather gruffly.

Christopher was astonished. He was accus-

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tomed to sudden changes of plan on the part of General Keith, but he had understood that important business must be attended to in New York, and they had been there but a week. He wished with all his heart that he had discovered Betty's abode sooner.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" he exclaimed. "Do we really have to go quite so soon, grandfather?"

"Certainly. And it was only this morning that you informed me that you preferred Maybury to New York."

"But that was before I found Betty."

"Betty or no Betty, we go to-morrow. And now you may leave me. Ring for Thomas."

The boy walked to the bell and pressed it. Before he left the room he came back to his grandfather's side and stood there.

"Well, what is it now?" asked the General, testily.

"I've got to write and say I can't come."

"Of course."

"Shall I write to Mrs. Hamilton or Betty?"

"Either — both — anything you like. Don't trouble me with that now, Christopher. I have too many arrangements to attend to."

Christopher went to his own room, and sat down at his desk. He was quite sure that this plan to go to the country the following day had not occurred to his grandfather until he had been told of the

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invitation to luncheon. He had been in no hurry to leave the city, and he had seemed to have plenty of time at his disposal to listen to Christopher. It was all in keeping, however, with what he knew of his grandfather's nature. He did not wish him to lunch at the Hamiltons', and in his usual hasty way had determined to leave town to avoid it, instead of following the simpler plan of refusing to allow him to accept the invitation. General Keith was apt to decide hastily and then stick to his resolution, even when further reflection might make it seem unwise to do so. Christopher had not really expected to be allowed again to go to the Hamiltons', so he was not disappointed. He was only sorry. He consoled himself by writing two notes, as his grandfather had said that it would be permissible. He liked to write, and it was never difficult for him to express himself. So he devoted himself to this while his grandfather gave his orders, and the whole household was thrown into agitation by the news of their speedy departure for Maybury.

The next morning Betty was late for breakfast. It was a case of tangles and a difference of opinion with Gertrude about a frock. Betty wished to wear her "best every-day dress" to school, that she might, upon her return, be fully prepared for

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company without further effort. Gertrude felt that the usual school costume was "good enough" for one small boy who might come.

"Of course he'll come!" exclaimed Betty. "Why shouldn't he, when he had no previous engagement? Of course, his grandfather wouldn't prevent his coming to our house, when his wife's own nephew is married to my own father's own sister. It makes him a sort of relation."

She was somewhat chagrined, therefore, to find a note at her plate which proved Gertrude to be right. It ran:

"DEAR BETTY,—Grandfather and I are going to Maybury to-morrow, so I cannot go to your house. I am awfully sorry. I am glad I met you to-day, only I guess we should not have gone if I had not seen you. I like Brown ever so much. I wish I had a dog like Brown, only grandfather does not like dogs, so I can't.

"Good-bye. I hope I will see you sometimes in Maybury.

"Yours truly,

"CHRISTOPHER LOVEL."

"He can't come!" said Betty, looking up from her letter. "Isn't that too mean? And he says they wouldn't be going to Maybury to-day if he hadn't met me, mamma. How could meeting me make them go to Maybury?"

Betty, as she spoke, watched her mother, who was looking across the table at her father.

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"That is very characteristic of the General, Charlie, isn't it? The boy says in his note to me: 'I did not know we were going so soon, but grandfather has just this minute made up his mind to go to-morrow, and everybody is surprised and is hurrying to get ready.' Could it possibly be because— Surely he must have learned! He won't make the same mistake with this grandchild that he did with his son and daughter, I hope."

"It looks like it," said Mr. Hamilton. "Bessie, I am really sorry for that boy. I believe he would have stood more chance for real happiness if he could have lived with the Toppans, who wanted him so much. We must do what we can this summer to have him with our children. The old General always was a fierce disciplinarian, and what with his experience in the army and his immense wealth he has always had his own way. We shall have to use some tact."

"Ludovic will help us," said Mrs. Hamilton. "He really has some influence with his uncle, I think."

The conversation then turned to something else which had no connection with Christopher, but Betty had heard enough to give her food for thought during the remainder of the meal. What a perfectly dreadful person that old Gen-

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eral must be, she said to herself. She had never liked him. She remembered now how very disagreeable she had considered him, before any one knew that he was Christopher's grandfather, and when Chris used to stand up for him and say that he liked him. By this time he must have found out that Betty was right, and she looked forward with pleasure to an opportunity for proving this to him when they should meet in Maybury. She wished that she need not wait so long. This was early April, and as the family was not to go to Maybury until May, it would be a whole month before she should have the opportunity to speak to Christopher—an interminable period. She wished also that she could see General Keith's town house. She had heard of its magnificence. It was said to be one of the handsomest houses on Madison Avenue, so that meant a very fine house indeed. She had seen the outside of it, for it was just around the corner from her school. She wondered at what hour they were going to start for Maybury; very probably not until late in the day. She determined to stop at the house on her way from school. It would then be one o'clock, and she might have just time enough for a glimpse of the mansion and a word with the owner. Betty knew no fear, and quite looked forward to telling the General that her father and mother did not

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approve of the course he was pursuing with Christopher. She had such immense faith in the good judgment of her parents that she really felt it to be her duty to give General Keith the benefit of their opinions. She decided to say nothing at home of her intentions. It would be time enough for that when she returned, and—well, it was just possible that her father would object. Her father, in spite of his good judgment, sometimes prevented her from carrying out plans that to Betty seemed so excellent.

Betty Hamilton was an impulsive girl, and one who might even be called headstrong. When an idea came to her like this one, an idea which suggested all sorts of possibilities in the way of adventure that would make a fine story to relate to Charles and Pauline—this last was dear to Betty's heart; it was such unmitigated pleasure to impress Charles and Pauline—she seldom stopped to deliberate. She made up her mind and did it. The time for deliberation came later, when the deed was done and everybody disapproved. Her mother feared that Betty would learn only through some great experience. She remembered, however, that she herself had been an eager, restless child, full of impulse and mischievous pranks, and also of intense affection. Betty hid her feelings under a seemingly careless

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exterior, but she was very loving, and by love could always be ruled.

Perhaps she would have told her mother of her intention of stopping to say good-bye to Chris if Mrs. Hamilton had not been called to the telephone from the breakfast-table and then to an interview with a lady who came very early on a matter of great importance. The children started for school without seeing her again. Of course, Betty had no thought of telling any one else about it. It would spoil the whole story if Charles and Pauline knew about it beforehand. She was, therefore, very silent as she and her sister walked up Madison Avenue, and as Pauline was engaged in the pursuit of a poetical fancy she made no effort to break the welcome silence. Pauline was to go home after school with a friend to luncheon, so Betty felt that there would be no danger of being prevented by her. The difficulty would lie in disposing of Gertrude, who always walked to school with them and came again at half-past one to accompany them home. Betty knew that it would be hard to persuade the determined Gertrude to vary her custom to such an extent as a call upon General Keith and Christopher would require. She puzzled over it for some time, and then very wisely waited to see how things turned out. There was a barely possible chance that Marie, one of the younger

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and more docile maids would come for her. Gertrude had been anxious to go to see a sister who lived in Hoboken, and Mrs. Hamilton had spoken of arranging to have her take that day for the expedition. If it were Marie who came to the school, Betty knew that she should find it easy enough to carry out her plans.

III

AND Marie it proved to be. When school was dismissed, and Betty and all the other girls left the school-room and went to the cloak-room, there was Marie, the young French maid, waiting to help her put on her hat and coat. Marie had not been living long with Mrs. Hamilton, and this was the first time she had been sent to the school for Pauline and Betty. Gertrude did not approve of Marie, but this was supposed to be because she was elderly and German, while Marie was young and French. Gertrude declared Marie to be deceitful and flighty.

"Mark my words, Mrs. Hamilton," she had said, with the freedom of an old servant, "she is not to be trusted." And she had been unwilling to go to Hoboken that morning if it were to devolve upon Marie to take her place in walking home with Betty. But Mrs. Hamilton, attributing her fancies to her well-known jealous disposition, and intending that Marie should be available for this very duty, only laughed at her objections. Marie had come to her with a very

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good recommendation. Her French was excellent and her appearance most pleasing. She instructed Marie to speak only in French to the children, and then sent Gertrude to Hoboken while she herself went to do some shopping and afterward to take luncheon with her sister-in-law, Mrs. Lewis, who lived in the country not far from New York, and who had telephoned that morning begging her to come.

Betty was ready in a very short time. She bade a hasty good-bye to her friends and hurried away with a rapidity that would have surprised Gertrude, who complained constantly of Betty's slowness in putting on her hat and coat, and of her desire to linger and chat with the girls after school. To-day she was the first to leave, and as she walked with Marie toward Madison Avenue she told her that she wished to stop on the way home to call upon a friend who was going that day to the country, and whom, therefore, she should not see again a long time.

"Parlez Français, parlez Français, mademoiselle, s'il vous plaît!" exclaimed Marie, with her irreproachable accent. "Madame votre mère m'a dit qu'il faut parler Français toujours. Toujours!"

"Je n'aime pas parler Français," grumbled Betty; adding in English: "What's the use?"

She recovered her temper, however, and soon

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discovered that the plan of stopping at General Keith's house was especially pleasing to Marie, for she herself would like to call upon a friend—in fact, it was a cousin who lived “bien prochaine” in “L'Avenue Troisième.” What could be more convenient and desirable? She would leave “la petite demoiselle chez Monsieur le Général,” would seek “sa cousine,” and return “toute de suite, immédiatement, en cinq ou dix minutes.”

Betty detested being called “la petite demoiselle,” as she by no means considered herself to be so very little. Was she not eleven years old, and not very far from her twelfth birthday? It was provoking that she was not allowed to go out alone. Pauline enjoyed this great privilege, but it was not at all certain that Betty would be permitted to do it even when she should be as old as Pauline. Her mother would not promise. It all depended upon how careful a girl Betty should have become at thirteen.

She decided not to correct Marie for speaking of her as a “petite demoiselle” at present. She was too anxious to have her carry out her intention of calling in Third Avenue. It would be much more agreeable than to have her wait at General Keith's. So she avoided a dispute, and very pleasantly, and in excellent French, directed her to stay at least ten or fifteen minutes, and to make it fifteen if she possibly could, and then

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she ran quickly up the steps of the big, stone house with the paved court-yard and the high, wrought-iron fence which she had long known to be the home of Christopher's grandfather. She had insisted that Marie should not linger for an instant, so desirous was she to have it appear to the servant who should open the door that she was old enough to make calls by herself. Marie, eager to get to Third Avenue, obeyed her to the letter. When, therefore, the great front door was thrown open, Thomas found upon the steps only a little girl whose face seemed familiar to him, and who stood there and asked for Mr. Christopher Lovel with the dignity and self-possession of a grown-up lady.

"Yes, miss, he's at home, but he's going to start for the station in a very few minutes."

"Oh, then, I'm in time," said Betty, stepping into the house with perfect assurance. "I was so afraid he might have gone. Please tell him it's Miss Betty Hamilton, and I've just stopped to say good-bye to him—I don't like to ask for the General at the door," she added to herself. "I will ask Chris if I can see him."

She walked into the reception-room, which was at the right of the front door. Signs of a hasty departure were plainly visible in the house. Luggage stood in the hall; the furniture had not yet been covered, but piles of crash lay ready for

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the purpose, some of the ornaments had been put away, and the whole place seemed to be in the state of disorder which means the departure of the family.

Betty was not obliged to wait long, for Christopher was in the dining-room and came to her at once.

"Oh, Betty," he exclaimed, eagerly, "how splendid of you! I was so disappointed I couldn't come to lunch; but we're going right off. I was so sorry not to see you again to say good-bye, and here you are!"

"I thought I'd stop on my way from school, as I had to go right by the house. I didn't know what time you were going, but I thought I'd try it. Where's your grandfather?"

"He had to go down-town on business, and he is to meet us at the station. Thomas is going with me, and we have to start very soon, I think. Grandfather said to be there at half-past two. The other servants have gone. They went up in the early morning train so as to get things ready for us at Maybury. We are going to stop overnight in Boston, for grandfather wants to see some one who lives at Chestnut Hill."

"Are you?" said Betty. "In Boston? That's funny. You must mean you are going to spend the night in Philadelphia. Chestnut Hill is near

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Philadelphia. Well, I'm sorry not to see your grandfather. I wanted to particularly."

"What did you want to see him for?" asked Christopher, with some curiosity. He was not at all sure that his grandfather would be equally desirous of seeing Betty.

"Oh, I just wanted to tell him something my father said. I'll tell him when I get to Maybury. Oh, Chris, what is that?"

They were both startled by the sound of a heavy fall in the room above, the jar of which caused the chandelier to rattle and sway and the windows to shake. The perfect stillness which immediately ensued was even more alarming than the noise.

"Somebody must have dropped a trunk or a table or something," suggested Betty.

"You wait here while I go and see," said Chris.

Presently she heard rapid footsteps as of persons running to the room overhead. Quite a crowd of people seemed to be gathering there. She longed to join them and see for herself what had happened, but she did not feel quite at liberty to go up-stairs. While she hesitated Chris came back. His face was white, and he looked very much frightened.

"Thomas has fallen off the step-ladder," he whispered. "He is lying perfectly still, and I'm afraid he is dead. They're going for the doctor."

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While he spoke a woman ran down-stairs and out at the door. She wore no hat or coat, and from the window they watched her run across the street and disappear around the corner.

"What shall I do?" asked Christopher, glad to have Betty to turn to for counsel. "Grandfather will be waiting for us at the station, and unless somebody goes and tells him he will be dreadfully frightened. He will think something has happened to me. He is always thinking that."

"Then the best plan will be to go yourself and tell him," said Betty, with her usual promptness. "I will go with you."

"Oh, will you?" said Chris, greatly relieved. "I shall be ever so much obliged if you will. You see, I don't know my way around New York at all. We go to the Grand Central Station, I think."

"Oh no, you don't. Not if you are going to Chestnut Hill. You made a mistake just now when you said it was near Boston. You got it mixed up with something else. To go to Chestnut Hill you have to go to Philadelphia, and to get to Philadelphia you have to go over to the station at Jersey City. I know that for certain, for I have been to Chestnut Hill. One of my aunts lives there."

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She spoke with great positiveness, glad of a chance to show that she had travelled. Chris was very much surprised.

"I am sure we go to Boston," he said. "We have to go part way to Boston to get to Maybury. I know to go to Maybury we have to leave the Grand Central Station."

"Oh no, perhaps you don't. There is always some roundabout way, anyhow, of getting to places. Very likely there is some short cut your grandfather knows about that will take you to Maybury from Philadelphia. At any rate, I am certain sure you go to Philadelphia to get to Chestnut Hill. Why, I have been there, I tell you! I think I ought to know."

Betty spoke with an air of such authority that Christopher allowed himself to be convinced, strange as it appeared to him that it could be as she declared. His grandfather, it was true, had given all the necessary directions to Thomas. It was his habit to treat Christopher as though he were a very small child. His lameness, of course, made him seem younger and more helpless than other boys of his age. His experiences before his accident had been of a nature that would tend to harden him, but the long illness in the hospital and his life since then had had an opposite effect. He was closely shielded now, with servants to watch and care for him, and no

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opportunity whatever to assert the independence of thought and action that is natural to every healthy normal boy.

When Betty, therefore, declared that his grandfather would be awaiting him at the Pennsylvania Railroad Station in Jersey City he was surprised, but supposed her to be right. His chief thought now was to reach him and tell him of the dreadful fate that had overtaken the faithful Thomas. The people in the house who were with Thomas now were scrubbing-women and the man and his wife who were left in charge of the house when General Keith was out of town. As Chris had told Betty, the other servants had started for Maybury by an early train. The carriage which had been ordered to take the boy to the station was now waiting at the door. Christopher went up-stairs and told one of the women that he was going to the station to get General Keith and would soon be back. He asked about Thomas, and learned that he was still unconscious. This made him all the more anxious to see his grandfather, and he turned and hurried down to the front door, where Betty was awaiting him. He did not mention her to the woman, and as Thomas had opened the door for her no one else knew that she was there. The two children went down the steps and entered the carriage.

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"Pennsylvania depot, Jersey City," said Christopher, very grandly.

"Any baggage?" asked the driver.

"No, and please drive as fast as you can. It is very important."

The cabman touched his hat, and as he was a good-natured cabby he smiled, feeling sorry for the little chap's lameness. He slammed the door, mounted the box, and presently they were driving rapidly down Madison Avenue. Instead of turning off when they reached the Grand Central Station, and thus taking Christopher to the place where his grandfather was already impatiently awaiting him, he continued on to Twenty-third Street, and, turning to the right, proceeded as fast as he could in the direction of the Hudson River.

"It is the queerest thing that we should be coming down here," said Chris, looking out of the window as they drove up to the ferry-house. "I didn't know we had to cross the ferry. Grandfather never said a word about that. Do you suppose he will be waiting on this side of the river or the other?"

"Did he say you were to meet in the station?"

"Yes."

"Then, of course, he meant the other side. He would have said this side if he had meant it. You told me he had gone down-town, so of

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course he will cross over by one of the lower ferries. They take you to the Pennsylvania Station, too."

"Betty, what a lot you know about the stations!" said Chris, admiringly.

"Well, you see, I have lived in New York my whole life long, and I have often been to Philadelphia to stay with my aunt at Chestnut Hill. It is a most fortunate thing you told me that your grandfather wanted to see some one who lives at Chestnut Hill. If you hadn't we should have gone to the Grand Central Station and waited there ages and ages, and your grandfather would have been waiting down here. Wouldn't he have been mad, though!"

"It is a good thing you came along, Betty, to tell me. Grandfather will be ever and ever so much obliged to you."

He paid the driver (Christopher was always well supplied with money), and they walked through the ferry-house and to the boat, which had just come into the slip. The crowd of passengers had disembarked, and another but similar crowd was hastening on board. It was all very interesting, not to say thrilling, and the children for a time quite forgot Thomas in the excitement of finding sheltered seats on the upper deck. The day was mild and clear. The river was full of craft of all kinds. An ocean liner was ap-

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proaching its berth, an armored cruiser lay anchored in mid-stream, a French battle-ship that was visiting our shores was an object of interest to every one. Ferry-boats, like huge living creatures, crawled across the broad water. There was a great, flat transportation-boat with a whole train of cars on it, and there were sail-boats, tug-boats, fire-boats, and steamers. And the sky was blue and the river was blue, and everywhere flags were flying against the blue, and downstream could be seen the Statue of Liberty, and on the New York side great business buildings, stretching upward their interminable height, and on the Jersey side was the smoke of railroads and factories, and everywhere the signs of life—life that must be lived to the uttermost degree of activity, where all who lived must hurry and work, work and hurry, or else be called a failure.

Chris and Betty did not waste time in any such reflections as these. There was too much to be watched and commented upon, even had anything of the kind occurred to them. Betty in particular had entirely forgotten that she had any duty in the world but that of accompanying Christopher, or any other claims upon her attention. Oddly enough, it was the sight of the French battle-ship which recalled to her the thought of her own family. "Goody! Goody!" she cried, her favorite form of exclamation.

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"What's the matter?" asked Chris.

"I never thought to leave word for Marie! She was to come back for me after she went to see her cousin in Third Avenue. She won't know where I've gone."

"Oh, they will tell her," said the boy, reassuringly. "I told Mrs. McGuire, the scrubbing-woman, that we were going to the station. Of course, she will tell Marie, and she'll know we will get you home from there. You will be a little late, but I don't believe your mother will be worried, do you?"

"Mamma won't know anything about it until I get back, for she has gone to lunch with Aunt Edith, so, of course, I shall get home long before she does."

"Oh, that is all right then. You needn't worry about that. And it's fun to come way down here, just we two, isn't it, Betty? I'm never allowed to go anywhere alone."

"I'm not, either, and it's such a bore to have a maid tagging round after you. Gertrude is such a strict person, too."

"Thomas isn't. Thomas is very nice, and I do wish he hadn't hurt himself. I wonder how he is now."

"Probably he is ever so much better by this time. I suppose Marie has been there and has gone home. She isn't at all strict, but the worst

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of her is that I'm not allowed to speak English when she is with me, and I do hate talking French."

"Oh, I don't! I love it. I have been taking lessons ever since I came to live with grandfather. He speaks it just like a Frenchman, and while we were abroad I was studying it and talking it all the time, and very often he and I speak it over here. Let's do it now."

"Oh no!" cried Betty; "I'm only too glad not to have to, as long as Marie isn't here."

They were silent for a little while. The boat ploughed its way through the water, lifting its hoarse voice to respond to the greetings of sister-boats, and gradually drawing nearer to the Jersey side. Chris was the first to speak.

"It seems ever so long since we left the house, Betty. I hope we sha'n't keep grandfather waiting very long. He hates so to wait for people."

"Oh, we shall get there by half-past two. See, we are getting to the slip now. Look out for the bump when we touch the dock."

The bump safely a thing of the past, they walked along the lengthy passageway which led to the station. They followed the throng into the waiting-room, and began eagerly to look for General Keith.

"He will probably be near the doors that lead to the Philadelphia trains," said Christopher.

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There were several such doors, for there seemed to be several trains that would soon start for Philadelphia, through trains to Washington and the South, express trains and accommodation trains, with but a small difference in their hours of departure. General Keith was nowhere to be found.

"He hasn't come yet," said Betty; "you see, we had plenty of time. It isn't half-past two yet; only a quarter past. That man drove so nice and fast."

"It's perfectly wonderful that we got here first," said Christopher, very much pleased that such should have been the case. "Grandfather says soldiers should always be prompt. Of course, I can never be a soldier. I only wish I could" (he sighed as he spoke), "but I can act like one, grandfather says."

"I'm rather glad you can't be," rejoined Betty. "It would be awful to have you go to the war and be killed."

"I don't believe there'll ever be another war," said the boy, somewhat regretfully, but pleased, on the whole, that Betty preferred that he should not be killed.

"You can't tell, because papa says we are a world power now, and no one knows what will happen. But I should think you would rather be in the navy, and that was such a splendid cruiser

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we saw this morning. Just think how much more fun it must be to go to sea and smash up other ships than just stay on land to fight!"

Christopher, the grandson of an old soldier, was not prepared to agree to this, and in a friendly argument as to the superior merits of the two branches of the service the time passed rapidly away, and they were surprised presently to find that it was twenty minutes of three and still the General had not come.

"I am afraid there has been some mistake," said Christopher, "or perhaps something has happened to grandfather, too. He may have had an accident. Or perhaps, after all, he is waiting on the other side of the river."

"Oh, I don't believe so," said Betty. In her efforts to make her words very reassuring she raised her voice and spoke with even more than her customary clearness. She had frequently been told that she spoke too loud, but she forgot these admonitions, and what she said was perfectly audible to the persons sitting near. "You may depend upon it, Chris, General Keith will be here soon. If he doesn't come he will send you word and tell you where to go to meet him. I suppose business has kept him; it often does papa. And I'll stay with you until he comes, as sure as my name is Betty Hamilton."

"It is awfully good of you," said the boy.

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"But I can't help feeling we have made a mistake. I think we ought to have gone to the other station or stayed on the New York side."

"Christopher Lovel!" exclaimed Betty, indignantly, "you are a perfect goose to think that. Of course it is this station, and you see if I'm not right! General Keith will either come himself very soon, or send some man or somebody to get you."

In a short time her words were apparently verified. General Keith did not arrive, but a man, well dressed and with exceedingly good manners, walked up to the bench where they were sitting.

"Are you Christopher Lovel?" he asked.

"Yes!" cried Christopher, eagerly. "Did my grandfather send you to find me?"

"He did. Your grandfather, General Keith. He has been detained by business, and will not start to-day. He wants you to meet him. I will take you to him."

"Down-town?" asked the boy. "Is he still down-town?"

"He is still down-town."

"Oh, that is all right. Thomas isn't here, you see."

"I see he isn't," said the man.

"This is my friend Betty Hamilton. She came down with me."

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The man took off his hat to Betty with the greatest politeness. She was immensely pleased.

"I will keep with you, Chris," she said. "I am afraid I couldn't find my way home alone."

"By all means keep with us, Miss Betty," said the man. "The General would much prefer that you should do so. Come this way, if you please. We go out by this door."

"Don't we go to the ferry?" asked Betty, in surprise.

"Not that ferry. We go to another."

They left the waiting-room, not unnoticed by the persons who had been sitting near them. The lame boy with the golden hair and the blue eyes was one whom people frequently turned to look at a second time. Betty, too, was unusual looking. She carried herself well, and her bright, alert look, her short, red curls, her general air of distinction, made her noticeable. A woman who had missed her train saw them walk away.

"I am glad some one has come for those children at last," she said to herself. "I thought they couldn't be brother and sister. They don't look a bit alike. I thought it was funny that children of that class should be waiting here alone so long. I suppose he is the grandson of the famous General Keith, such a brave soldier and yet so rich. Well, that boy will have a lot of money, and p'raps that will make up some-

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what for his being lame; but it's too bad he has to limp. He's got a lovely face, though. It's more than the man has who came for them; there was something queer about him. I wonder, now, if he really was sent after the boy, as he said."

IV

MARIE found "sa cousine" who lived on Third Avenue so entertaining and so glad to see her that she was persuaded to lengthen her call until it far exceeded the ten or fifteen minutes which she had promised herself; in fact, it was a quarter of two by a slow clock before she could tear herself from the family circle, and it was with reluctant footsteps even then that she pursued her way back to Madison Avenue. She was accompanied by Jean, who was employed at one of the hotels, and whose mid-day hour of freedom had coincided very nicely and conveniently with Marie's call. In such society the walk was all too short, and it was with a heavy sigh that Marie finally bade him farewell at the corner, and with a mind full of many more interesting affairs than those of "Mademoiselle Betti" she mounted the steps of General Keith's house.

It was a long time before the door was opened in response to her repeated ringing of the bell. At last one of the scrubbing-women came to the door.

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"Mademoiselle Betti Ameeltone," said Marie, in her broken English, "eez ze here? Zay to her, eef you please, zat Marie eez come."

"Sure an' I don't know what yer afther," replied Mrs. McGuire. "'There ain't no such person livin' here. Yer at the wrong house."

She was about to close the door in summary fashion when Marie interposed.

"Zee eez come to make her adieux to—to—what eez his name? I haf forgotten how he calls himself, but it eez zee leetle lame boy."

"Master Christopher yer afther talkin' about, I'll warrant, though how any Christian body's to understand yer dago lingo is more than I know. Well, he's out, an' I ain't seen no young lady, an' there ain't none been here. An' I'll thank yer not to keep me standin' here when Thomas is dead already for aught I know, an' the Gin-eral 'll be home soon, an' there'll be row enough. The saints presarve us if there ain't some one a-callin' me now! No, she ain't here. Try next door." And General Keith's front door was closed with a bang.

But Marie did not try next door. She knew that it was this house which her charge had entered, for it was unlike all the other houses in the block and she could not mistake it. As the boy was out she concluded that Betty had gone home without waiting for her, so she walked

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down Madison Avenue rather quickly, knowing that it was quite against the rules for the little girl to be out alone, and feeling very glad that Mrs. Hamilton and the tyrannical Gertrude were both absent. When she reached the house, however, and upon inquiry found that Betty had not come in, her complacency received a severe shock. It was in no way lessened by the attitude toward her of the other servants. Marie was not popular, and this was an opportunity not to be lost. They gathered about her—the cook, the laundress, the chambermaid, and even William, whom she had supposed to be an admirer—and upbraided her for the absence of Miss Betty. They painted in glowing and frightful colors the wrath of Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton when Marie's delinquency should be discovered. They were all Irish except the butler, and he was English. Not one of them could tolerate the French maid. She felt herself an alien in a strange land. The charms of the family circle in Third Avenue, with the daily calls of Jean, took possession of her mind. Her wages had been paid that morning. There was nothing, therefore, to prevent her departure. She went up to her room, and presently, when no one was looking, when all the servants were still holding an indignant conclave in the basement, she stole down the front stairs and out of the front door, carrying her possessions in the

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two neat suit-cases which had brought them. She turned in the direction that led her away from the view of the basement windows, and soon Marie was lost in the crowd and was well on her way to the haven of Third Avenue, congratulating herself as she went that no one in the Hamilton household knew that she had friends there. They would never find her.

It happened that not one of the family was at home at luncheon that day.

Mrs. Hamilton came in at about half-past three, and was told at once of the absence of Betty. She sent for Marie, and William despatched the chambermaid to call her to the presence of her mistress. Nora returned from her errand with flying feet.

"She ain't there, Mrs. Hamilton!" she exclaimed. "She ain't there, and none of her things ain't there! She's gone, and she's took everything she owned! There ain't so much as a pin left."

Further investigation proved this to be true, and Mrs. Hamilton felt puzzled. She was not yet alarmed, for she supposed that Betty had done just what the servants had thought—she had gone home with one of her school-mates and evaded Marie altogether. Mrs. Hamilton was annoyed, however. She was surprised that Betty should have done something which was clearly

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against rules, for the children were expected always to ask permission to go out to luncheon, and Betty had never transgressed this law before. As to the departure of Marie, perhaps it was just as well, for she had made herself so much disliked in the household that no doubt dismissal would have been necessary eventually. Mrs. Hamilton smiled to herself when she pictured Gertrude's triumph, upon her return, to discover all her predictions verified.

At about four o'clock Pauline came home. She found her mother in her own room and alone, and she sat down as close to her as she could place her chair, delighted at the thought of "a good talk with mamma without one of the other children."

"Where did Betty go to lunch, Pauline?" asked Mrs. Hamilton.

"Betty! Why, nowhere. She came home with Marie."

"No, my dear, she didn't. Marie came home without her."

"Then she must know where she is, for she left school with her. Marie helped me on with my things, and Betty was there with us. She got my gloves by mistake. She didn't say anything about going anywhere to lunch, and I don't think she would, mamma, without asking you. Betty never does. I saw her going along

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toward Madison Avenue with Marie when I came out. Alice and I turned toward Fifth Avenue, you know, to go to her house."

"Are you sure you saw Betty with Marie, Pauline?" asked her mother, now feeling a vague alarm.

"Why, of course, I am, mamma! Isn't Marie at home? Why don't you ask her where she left Betty?"

"Marie has gone! She— Oh, Pauline, how stupid I have been! Of course, I see it all now! Something has happened, and Marie was afraid to tell it and has run away, and I have been sitting here quietly and have lost all this time. Oh, my dear, help me to think! What shall we do first?"

"I think the first thing we had better do is to telephone to papa," said Pauline. "Don't worry, mamma. It is probably all right, and Betty may come in any time. Dear mamma, *don't* look so frightened."

Pauline went to the telephone, and soon returned with a message from her father.

"He is coming right home; but he says we must telephone to all of Betty's friends, every one we can think of, and ask if they know where she went. But he says she will probably be home soon, only we had better not take any chances. And he says not to worry, because it is just like

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Betty to take us by surprise; but we had better send William to Marie's friends and find out where she is, and to look and see if she has stolen anything."

Very soon these matters were all set in train, but with small result. Betty's school-mates had been communicated with, but as yet no one had seen her. William returned from the only friends that Marie was supposed to have, and they knew nothing about her. And so far as anything could be discovered, nothing had been stolen from the Hamilton household, "though that's a thing you don't find out for a long while," said the cook, oracularly, "what with the handkerchiefs and the collars and the bits of lace she might pocket as easy as yer please."

But Mrs. Hamilton felt as though theft were a small matter. Where was Betty, her youngest, her baby, the child so carefully shielded and guarded, whose very mischief and fun made her so dear to all? There was nothing to be done now but wait for Mr. Hamilton to come, and to watch from the window for Betty, while Pauline stood at the telephone and eagerly called up house after house, only to receive the unvarying reply: "No, she has not been here to-day. . . . Yes, I am quite sure."

It was about half-past four o'clock when Mr. Hamilton reached home. Mrs. Hamilton saw

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him coming, and ran down-stairs to open the door herself.

"She hasn't come home?" he asked, but he was answered even before he spoke. One look at his wife's face was enough. "My dear, you needn't be so frightened. You know, Betty is always up to mischief, and you know how she forgets time. I am pretty sure she will come walking in very soon, and we shall have had all our fright for nothing."

"I am not sure that she will, Charlie, and neither are you. Betty is mischievous, but she is never directly disobedient, and the very fact that Marie has disappeared shows that something is quite wrong. She has not taken anything. She has just vanished. I am sure something has happened and she was afraid to tell it, and— What's that? Did a carriage stop? Pauline, is it—is it—"

"It is an old gentleman, mamma. He is getting out and coming up the steps."

"I can't see any one, Charlie. Please tell William."

Mr. Hamilton went out into the hall, but the man had already opened the door.

"I must see Mrs. Hamilton at once or any one who is at home. It is most important—"

Mr. Hamilton heard that much, and then went forward.

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"General Keith!" he exclaimed, in surprise. "What can I do for you?"

"You can help me to find my grandson. He is here, I suppose," said the General, sharply. "I cannot understand the matter at all. Christopher wished to come, I could see that, but that he should do so when I expressly forbade it, when I made all my arrangements to leave town, and actually went to the station and waited an hour—"

"Christopher is not here, General Keith," interposed Mrs. Hamilton, from the door of the parlor. "He has not been here to-day."

"What!" thundered the old man. "Not here? Then where is he?"

There was a moment's breathless silence. It was Pauline who broke it.

"I shouldn't wonder," said she, "if they were together and have gotten lost."

"If who were together?" demanded the General, turning upon her. He had not even seen her until she spoke.

"Betty and Chris."

"Precisely what I said myself. Will you kindly tell me, without further unnecessary delay, where that child is—that girl? She has led Christopher into danger before this. Now, where is she? When I heard she had been at the house I knew she was at the bottom of it all. Why, I have been waiting—"

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"Was my daughter at your house to-day, General Keith?"

"Of course she was. Haven't I said so more than once?"

"Will you be good enough to tell me exactly when she was there?" asked Mr. Hamilton. "We are very much alarmed by her absence, and until you told us this we have not had the slightest clew to her whereabouts since she left school. Mrs. Hamilton is exceedingly anxious, as you must see. Perhaps if we were to talk the matter over we could agree upon some plan for tracing the children. How long ago did you discover that the boy was missing?"

His serious face, his concerned voice, no less than his quiet manner, made an impression upon the irascible General. He controlled his ill-temper, and, following Mrs. Hamilton into the parlor, he took the chair which Mr. Hamilton drew up for him. They all sat down.

"I made all my arrangements to go to Maybury to-day," he said. "It was a rather sudden determination, but for many reasons it seemed best to go. As it has turned out, I might just as well have stayed—but no matter. We were going. I was obliged to go down to Wall Street, and I left directions for Thomas, my man, to bring Christopher to the Grand Central Station and to be there promptly at half-past two. We

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were to take the three o'clock limited, but I wished them to be there in good season. I waited there until long after three o'clock. They did not come. I went to my house, and found that Thomas had fallen from a step-ladder. What he was up on a ladder for when he was about to start for Boston, *I don't know.* But there he was; he had fallen from a step-ladder, and knocked his head in some way, and therefore became unconscious—fainted—and they all thought he was dead; none but ignorant char-people about, all the other servants gone to May-bury, and great delay in finding a doctor. Christopher told one of the women he would go to the station and meet me, and it seemed he started off in a carriage—by himself, she supposed. I have seen the stable people, and the man who drove him is off on another trip. They are to send him to me as soon as he comes in. In the mean time Thomas has come to. He isn't much hurt—just enough to have caused all this trouble—and he says that a little girl came to say good-bye to Christopher just before he fell, and that it was your daughter. That was enough for me. I knew at once that Miss Betty Hamilton, with her well-known propensity for getting herself and other people into mischief, had prevailed upon him to do something he ought not to do, and had led him into some scrape, and

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so I came to you at once. Now, where are they?"

"We haven't the least idea," said Mr. Hamilton, "but I think we are nearer to finding out than we were before. The coachman—"

Mrs. Hamilton interrupted him. "General Keith," she said, "I cannot permit you to speak so severely of Betty. She is never disobedient."

"Disobedient or not, she is very mischievous," replied General Keith. "My dear madam, you perhaps did not hear of the dance she led my nephew by means of a bogus telegram last summer?"

"I think we are wasting time," said Mr. Hamilton. "General, if you will give me the name of the livery-stable, I will telephone there and find out if the man has come in. It will save time if they will telephone here instead of to your house. Have I your permission to do this?"

"Certainly; certainly. I detest telephones, but they have their uses, after all."

Mr. Hamilton went to the instrument in the hall. Presently General Keith turned to Betty's mother.

"You must pardon me," he said, with his most courtly manner, "if I spoke hastily in regard to your daughter. I am very much alarmed about my grandson. He is lame, and he is quite ignorant of New York. And he is all I have."

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"Yes, oh yes! I understand," said Mrs. Hamilton. "We both have cause to be anxious. We must not quarrel." She tried to smile as she spoke.

They were silent again until Mr. Hamilton came hurriedly into the room. "The coachman has just come in," he said. "I have been speaking to him myself. He drove a lame boy and a little girl about the same age, with red, curly hair, to the Twenty-third Street ferry. They were going to the Pennsylvania Railroad Station. He watched them go on board the boat before he left the ferry-house. Of course, it was Betty and Christopher."

General Keith started to his feet. "The Pennsylvania Station!" he exclaimed. "And I said so distinctly the Grand Central! What did the boy mean?"

"Suppose we go right down there together, General. Then we can find out. I will order a motor-cab."

And in a very few minutes they were off, and Mrs. Hamilton and Pauline were left to their weary waiting. And presently Charles came home and then Florence, and to each was told the story. They all tried to comfort and encourage one another, but it was not easy. If the children had gone to the wrong station they must long since have discovered their mistake.

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Why, then, had they not come home? And so the time wore away, and no one came, nor was there any message. It was no wonder that the waiting family grew more and more anxious.

But Mr. Hamilton and General Keith had discovered something which was so alarming that Betty's father dared not telephone to his wife at all, lest he should betray it in some way. A woman sitting in the station and watching the two gentlemen as they made inquiries of the officials had stopped them as they passed her.

"Are you looking for a lame boy and a girl with red curls?" she asked, hesitatingly. "There, I thought so. I suspected there was something wrong when I saw them go off with him. A man came up to them and said some general—General Keith, I think he said, though I won't be certain—had sent him after them. A tall, dark-haired man in good clothes, but something queer about him. They all went out that door. . . . Oh no, I thank you! I'm glad if I've been of any use. He had dark hair and no mustache and awful big ears. That's all I could say of his looks. (There," she added, to herself, "I was mad enough about missing my train and having to wait three hours for another, but I guess there was some good purpose in it, after all, if I've set those gentlemen on the right track to find their children. My, but it's awful what things are done nowa-

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days! I dare say it 'll all be in the papers tomorrow. That General Keith is so rich, and I suppose the scoundrel wants the reward. And I'm glad that nice gentleman took my name and address. It will be quite a journey if I have to come to the city to identify the wretch, but I'd go farther than that to bring such a scamp as he must be to justice. Stealing children like that! I thought at the time he was queer looking.'")

V

WHEN Betty and Christopher, accompanied by their new friend, left the station, they started off on a brisk walk through the streets of Jersey City.

"You won't mind a little walk, I suppose, after sitting still so long," said their guide, in his very polite way.

Betty considered him quite the most polite person she had ever known. The way in which he stepped aside and let her go through a door first, and the courtly manner with which he touched her elbow to guide her over a muddy crossing, made a profound impression on her. She had never noticed before that gentlemen took ladies by the elbow to assist them across the street; but then she had never met a Jersey City gentleman, and no doubt it was the custom of the place, she said to herself. There were other things, too, that were unusual about their new friend, and yet she could not have said exactly what they were. His clothes were not shabby; on the contrary, they looked very new; but they were

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rather aggressive in style, and did not seem to fit well. His polite manners did not fit well, either; in fact, they became so exaggerated that Betty began to wonder if he really were a gentleman. Perhaps he was a butler or a groom or a coachman whom General Keith had sent. She glanced at his face. He had a rather disagreeable expression, in spite of his gallant ways. She had never seen any one with such closely cropped hair and such enormous ears. She wondered what Chris thought of him.

The boy was chatting pleasantly. As usual, he was cordial and friendly. It required some very pointed incivility or unkindness to make Christopher suspect ill-will. Then, too, his past life had thrown him with all sorts and conditions of men. He would not, therefore, be so apt as Betty to decide that a man was or was not a gentleman.

They walked until Christopher felt rather tired.

"I am sorry," he said, looking up in his bright way at the man, "but I shall have to ask you to go a little more slowly. You see, I am lame, and I'm not quite used yet to my artificial leg. I suppose you didn't know I had one, did you? Most people don't until I tell them."

"Well, now, I never guessed it at all. You manage it fine," replied their guide, slackening his speed slightly, but still walking briskly.

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"Why don't we take a carriage?" asked Betty. "Where are we going, anyway? or can't we go in a car to where General Keith is waiting?"

"No, my little lady, we can't," said the man, rather less civilly than he had yet spoken. "There is no car that goes where we're going—at least, we're not going to take it."

Betty looked at him again. This was certainly no gentleman.

She had been very stupid to think for an instant that he was one. She had been so pleased that General Keith had at last sent for them, and so impressed by the manners of his emissary, that she had not been as discriminating as usual.

"Which ferry do we take?" she asked next.

"You wait and see."

This was certainly peculiar, not to say provoking.

"I am accustomed," said Betty, very loftily, "to have people answer my questions."

"Well, my little lady, it's time you got used to something different."

They walked on in silence for some time. Christopher grew rather pale.

"I am very sorry," said he, at last, "but I think we will have to take a car or a carriage. My leg is hurting, and my grandfather never allows me to walk when it is hurting."

The man muttered something beneath his

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breath which to Betty's keen ears sounded amazingly like a "swear word." She was becoming very much puzzled. If General Keith had sent this person to bring his grandson to him, he surely would have given directions that he should ride, at least, in a car. Had the General really sent him? For the first time a well-defined suspicion that all was not as it should be entered Betty's mind, and having once gained entrance it stayed there. She reviewed the situation and the details of this man's first appearance in the station. He had known Christopher's name, and he had certainly spoken of General Keith by name and said that he had sent him. He had mentioned, too, that the General had been detained by business. Oh, it must be all right! There could be no other possible way for him to have arrived at the knowledge of the affairs of General Keith and Christopher.

While she was thinking these things the man had hailed a passing car. Betty had just time enough to see the word "Hoboken" upon it when they all entered it and the car sped on its way. Now this seemed more remarkable than anything yet. It could not be possible that General Keith should be awaiting Christopher in Hoboken. People only went to Hoboken to sail for Europe, she was sure. She wished that she

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might have a word with Chris, but the man was sitting between them; in fact, the man had always placed himself between them since they started on their walk. She had not had the smallest opportunity to speak to Chris. It suddenly occurred to her that it might be a good plan to speak in French if the chance came. She was quite sure that they would not be understood. The person who had them in charge did not look like one who was conversant with other languages than his own. Betty did not feel at all frightened. Her mind was so alert and her spirit so intrepid that she never thought of being alarmed. Her one idea was to find out what the man was planning to do, and to escape from his clutches as soon as possible.

She looked out of the window, and, from the numerous German names and signs that she saw, concluded that they were in Hoboken. She had been over there many times with Gertrude to visit her nurse's relatives, who were respectable, well-to-do people, and who lived very comfortably in German fashion, and Betty had always enjoyed going to see them; but she knew perfectly well that it was not at all probable that General Keith should have business in Hoboken and send for Christopher to meet him there.

At last the man stopped the car, and they all got out. Betty stepped quickly to Christopher's side.

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"It is all very strange," she said, in French. She was glad enough now that they both understood it. Even the despised language of Marie had its uses in an emergency. "I don't think your grandfather sent him. General Keith wouldn't have any business to do in Hoboken, unless he were going to sail for Europe. Perhaps the man is stealing us. What had we better do?"

Her French was by no means perfect, but Chris fortunately could understand it. The man did not, and consequently objected to its being used.

"See here," said he, in a very rude way, "you'd better shut up. We don't want any of that lingo. Straight American's good enough for us."

"I think I shall speak French if I want to," said Betty—"or German either," she added, not sorry to display her linguistic powers. "Quick!" she said, again in French. "We mustn't let him take us into a house. If we once got shut up in a house we might never get out."

This suggestion was horrible.

"If we could only see somebody we knew!" suggested Christopher.

"Somebody we knew! We shall never meet any one we know in Hoboken—unless it were Gertrude or some of her family. Oh, how I do wish we might meet Gertrude! Have you any money?"

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"Shut up, I tell you!" exclaimed the man, angrily. "There's no need at all for you to be holding consultations."

"I don't know why you speak to us in that way," said Christopher, gravely. "If my grandfather sent you for me, I know he would not mind my talking to Betty in French if I want to. Where are we to meet my grandfather?"

"Where he's waiting, and no place else. We'll get to the house soon."

They were both startled by this announcement. It was to a house, then, that he intended taking them! Betty determined to make a fight. If he took her into a house he would have to carry her screaming and kicking. She would arouse the neighborhood. She would call the police. The police! That was an idea. Strange that it had not occurred to her before. She looked eagerly up and down the streets. She actually saw a policeman standing on a corner a block away; but, to her disappointment, the man turned the corner that they were then on. She remembered that he had turned a great many abrupt corners in the course of their walk. Oh, what should they do? For the first time her courage failed. She felt miserably, horribly frightened.

But almost in the same moment that terror came, hope revived. She was suddenly impressed

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with the fact that she had been on this street before. The houses looked familiar, and she had often read the name and the signs on that beer-shop across the way. Was it—could it be—yes, it *was* the street where Gertrude's relatives lived! They must pass the very house.

"Pretend you are very tired," she said, quickly, in French. "Stop, and say you can't walk another step. I know what to do. But please, *please* do as I say. Attract his attention somehow. It will give me more time."

Christopher obeyed her implicitly. He could not imagine why she made this request, but he had perfect confidence in Betty. He stopped abruptly. "I can't walk another step," he said. "You will have to get a carriage or do something. I have got to sit down on these steps."

He did so, and the man turned to him in wrath and impatience. "Get right up and—" But he did not finish his sentence. To the utter amazement of both, Betty ran up the steps of a house a few doors farther on and pulled the bell-handle again and again, at the same time pounding on the door and shouting at the top of her voice.

"Frau Schmidt! Frau Schmidt!" she shrieked. "It's Betty Hamilton! Quick! Open the door! Frau Schmidt! Chris, shout, too! Make all the noise you can! Police! Fire! Murder! Thieves! Frau Schmidt! Police!"

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In an instant the door of the beer-shop across the way was opened and that of the little butcher-shop next door to it, and the doors of some of the houses, and windows were thrown up all along the street and heads were thrust out. What was the matter? Frau Schmidt came running to her door, followed by her daughters.

"Ach! Himmel!" she cried. "Es ist Fraulein Betti! Gertrud! Gertrud! Hier ist das kleine Fraulein. Was haben sie?"

And, wonderful to relate, Gertrude herself emerged from the front door to find her precious charge, whom she had supposed was at home in Madison Avenue, shouting aloud in the streets of Hoboken, while a few doors away a boy who must be Christopher Lovel sat upon the door-step and also shouted for the police and the fire-engines; and so much engaged were they all in looking and wondering at the children, and in asking them, with many exclamations of "Ach!" and "Himmel!" why they were behaving in this extraordinary manner, that they paid no attention to the man who was walking rapidly up the street, and who, turning the nearest corner, was soon lost to sight.

It would be impossible to describe the amazement of Gertrude or the relief of Betty and Christopher at this meeting. It was, indeed, most remarkable that they should have been led to the

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very door of their friends. When Gertrude heard the account of their experiences and of their wonderful escape from the clutches of their abductor, she knelt down among them all and thanked the good Lord for preserving her darling from harm. Then, rising, Gertrude took Betty in her arms and kissed her, the tears coming into her eyes, and her strong German face working with emotion. Betty had never seen her so moved since one night, long ago, when Pauline was ill, and it was feared she might not recover. At last she overcame her emotion, and, after questioning them once more, she remembered that they should lose no time in communicating with Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, who must by this time be sadly alarmed by Betty's prolonged absence. It was now long after five o'clock, and she could well imagine how uneasy Mrs. Hamilton must be. The full iniquity of Marie, of course, she did not guess, although she had given several exclamations in German, which Betty knew were scathing in significance, when she was told that Marie had been willing to leave Betty at General Keith's while she went to see a cousin.

Gertrude hurried across the street to a public telephone, and soon the glad news was communicated to Mrs. Hamilton, and then the good woman and the children entered a carriage which had been sent for, and amid the farewells of a throng

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of people they started for home. Betty, her alarms a thing of the past, thoroughly enjoyed her unusual position. She felt herself to be a very great personage indeed as she left the house of Schmidt, with all the Schmidts on the steps to see them off, and Herr Schmidt, who had come home and heard the news, to close the carriage door, and all the neighbors standing on the sidewalk, and even in the middle of the street, to bid them farewell. At first the excitement of all which they had been through, and the novelty of the drive from Hoboken, had an exhilarating effect upon both Betty and Christopher; but very soon that wore off, and the two tired children fell asleep, each with a head on Gertrude's comfortable shoulders as she sat between them on the broad seat of the hack. They had walked a very great distance, and it was not surprising that they were exhausted.

It was a long drive from Hoboken to the Hamiltons' house on Madison Avenue—first to the ferry and then across, and then with many delays and slow progress up-town; but at last it was over, and the carriage stopped in front of the well-known door. And then the door was thrown open, and down the steps came Mrs. Hamilton herself, and Charles and William to help them out, with Florence and Pauline close behind, and all the maids looking on. It was even more

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thrilling than the departure from the home of the Schmidts, and very much more delightful; for it was, indeed, good to get home.

"Oh, mamma, mamma!" cried Betty, with her arms tight around her mother's neck, after they were all safe in the house, "I'm afraid you've been terribly frightened about me, and I know it was all my fault. I oughtn't to have stopped to see Chris. But I was only going to stay a minute, and then Thomas fell down dead, and I had to go with Chris to find his grandfather. I'm so sorry, but I never thought about anything but helping Chris. I forgot it would take so long to go to the station."

"My darling, we will talk it all over to-morrow," said Mrs. Hamilton, in her tender way. Christopher, watching her face, thought it even more beautiful than he had before.

She looked up quickly, and met his steady gaze. His eyes were very solemn. He was not envious of Betty, but he felt sorry that he had no mother to take him in her arms like that when he came home. By some instinct Mrs. Hamilton read his thought as clearly as though he had spoken. She held out her hand and smiled at him. Chris went quickly to her side.

"Dear boy," she said, putting her arm about him and drawing him close to her, "I am glad Betty was with you, as you are both safely out

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of it now. You are very tired, aren't you? Would you like to have me ask your grandfather to let you spend the night here? I should so like to have you for my boy, just this once. Will you stay?"

"Oh, I wish I could!" he answered, eagerly; "but I am afraid my grandfather will want me at home. I ought to be there now, to tell him I'm safe. I was waiting for a chance to ask you please to let me go."

"Your grandfather knows you are safe, and he will soon be here himself. He and Mr. Hamilton have been looking for you, and sometime after Gertrude telephoned, Mr. Hamilton called me up, to tell me they had not found you yet; and then we could give them the wonderful news that you were safe, and were coming—that you were on the way."

And while she spoke the front door was heard to open, and Mr. Hamilton and the General came in.

It was hard for Christopher to realize that this was his dignified and austere grandfather. His customary coldness and apparent severity were laid aside. He was so rejoiced and thankful to receive again his dearly loved grandson, the boy who had gained a place in his affections even before he knew him to be his daughter's son, and who ever since then had daily become more

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and more precious to him, that he forgot to scold or even to question him as to his mistake in regard to the stations. This, no doubt, would come to-morrow; to-night there was only joy and thankfulness. Instead of censuring Betty for having been the means (as he strongly suspected) of Christopher's becoming involved in such an adventure, he complimented her, in his most courtly gentleman-of-the-old-school manner, for her acuteness of perception and her presence of mind, first in detecting that the man was an impostor, and then in speaking French in order to make known her suspicions to Christopher, and upon her "clever device" for bringing the Schmidts to their aid.

Betty was charmed, and decided that, after all, General Keith was a very pleasant old gentleman. When he consented to the request that Christopher should spend the night there, she was still more inclined to like him. It was plainly to be seen that he would prefer to take him home with him, but realizing the boy's fatigue he knew that it would be better for him to stay where he was. Presently, when he rose to go, Betty went to him.

"I hope you will excuse me for influencing Chris to go to the wrong station," she said. "It was not his fault at all."

"Oh yes, it was, Betty," said the boy. "I

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ought to have known better, oughtn't I, grandfather?"

"So it seems to me," said General Keith.

"No, it was really my fault, and I am truly sorry," persisted Betty. "Will you please excuse me?" She held out her hand.

The General took it in his own, and they shook hands very impressively. "I assure you," said he, "that your mistake was most natural."

"I like you better than I ever thought I should," continued Betty. "I am really not surprised that Chris loves you so much. You see, General Keith, you are so very icy in your way of speaking that it kind of freezes me to think of loving you, but Chris always has."

"Thank you," said the General, again shaking hands with her. "You could not have told me anything more gratifying for me to hear."

"And another thing," added Betty: "I think that, excepting my father, you are the gentlemanliest gentleman I ever met. I should like to have you for a friend."

"Betty!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamilton. And all the rest of her family also exclaimed: "Betty!"

But the old General actually smiled.

"Thank you, Miss Betty," said he, again. "The desire is mutual."

And, strangely enough, the compact entered

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into that night was never broken, in spite of many severe strains that were laid upon it.

Many efforts were made to find the man who had tried to steal the children, and for a long time the police of the three cities kept a sharp watch for such a person as he was described to be. It was supposed that he had been near them in the station, and so had overheard their remarks and the mention of General Keith's name. As the General was known to be very wealthy, it had no doubt occurred to the man that this might be an easy way to procure money—by holding the children for a ransom. Be this as it may, the man had escaped pursuit, and had probably gone now to some distant place where he was in no danger of detection.

VI

A DAY or two later General Keith and his grandson left New York for Boston, having waited for Thomas's complete recovery, that he might be with them. His injury was not severe in itself, although it had made him unconscious for a time, and very soon he was about again and able to perform his usual duties. The nights passed in Boston at one of the large hotels were like many other nights at other large hotels, which had been part of Christopher's experiences since his life with his grandfather began. They were all the same: the arrival, the obsequious hotel clerks, the spacious suite of apartments, the music while they dined, the well-dressed people, the hurrying bell-boys—all these, which had at first seemed so interesting to the little lame boy, whose former life had been full of the anxieties of poverty and ill-health, had now become an old and rather dull story.

No one would have guessed, however, that he considered it dull, and his grandfather, finding Christopher the most desirable companion whom

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he had yet encountered in the course of his long journey through life, took it completely for granted that he himself was all whom Christopher needed. He frowned upon the children with whom the boy chanced to become acquainted in their travels, and never encouraged further intimacy. To Christopher's friendly soul this was something of a trial, but as yet his own nature had not ventured to assert itself. Neither he nor his grandfather knew its strength. The people with whom he had lived had not all been kind. His grandfather loved him, and for this he was grateful. He never forgot that his changed circumstances were entirely due to this stern old man, and he cheerfully gave up the friends of his own age whom he chanced to find, and devoted himself to his grandfather.

They stayed two nights in Boston for General Keith to attend to his business with his acquaintance, who lived at Chestnut Hill, and then, early on the second morning, they drove to the station to take the train for Maybury. The journey from Boston was by a more direct route than that from New York, and as General Keith seated himself in his chair in the parlor-car, he remarked, with satisfaction to Christopher, that they should not be obliged to change.

"That is one reason," said he, "why I prefer to come to Boston. It takes an extra day, but

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it is easier. Are you comfortable, my boy? Have you something to read? Nothing? Well, the newsboy will be coming through soon, and then you can buy yourself some of the magazines and weeklies. Get anything you like. Here is some money."

The General gave him two dollars, and then, wheeling about in his chair, he opened his newspaper, and was soon absorbed in its contents. Christopher understood that he was not to be disturbed. His grandfather did not like to be spoken to while he was reading the financial news. There was nothing to be seen of him now but the top of his head and the huge paper, so Chris amused himself by looking out of the window or studying his fellow-passengers, while he awaited the coming through of the boy who sold books and papers.

At last the well-known cry was heard: "Boston and New York papers! All the latest magazines! *Harper's*, *Century*, *Scribner's*, *Puck*, *Judge*, *Life*, *Harper's Weekly*, *Ladies' Home Journal* out-to-day! Papers?" It sounded to Christopher just like every other newsboy he had listened to in every other train, and yet there was something in this boy's voice that he associated with other things than newspapers and magazines. He leaned over the arm of his chair and looked at the news-agent as he came down the aisle of the

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car. He wore the regulation blue uniform with brass buttons, and a military cap with a visor. He was tall and big, and as Chris watched him make his slow progress toward him he felt quite sure that he had seen this lad somewhere else, but whether it was as a newsboy on some train or in some quite different place he could not determine. He seemed to be doing a brisk business, for nearly every passenger made a purchase, and Chris wondered if anything would be left for him.

"Have you got a *St. Nicholas*?" he asked, when the youth in uniform at last reached his chair.

"No, but I can get you one at the next stop. *Puck*, *Judge*, *Life*—all the comic papers."

Christopher looked up at him. "I'll take one of each," said he, "and grandfather gave me two dollars, so give me some magazines that have a lot of pictures, please—two dollars' worth. Why, I know who you are! You're George Smith!"

"That's my name, sure, and I know who you are, too. You're little Chris Lovel! I saw you the minute you came on board, but I wasn't going to let on until you spoke first. I say, you're no end of a swell now, ain't you, spendin' two plunks as easy as nothin'?"

"Oh no, I'm not a swell," replied Chris. "That's my grandfather's two dollars. I'm awfully glad to see you, George! How's Lucy?"

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"She's all right, last I heard of her. I'm a railroad man now, and don't get no time to go to Maybury. My route only goes half-way, and then I take a train back. I've got to go on through now, but I'll come back when I get your *St. Nicholas*."

He passed on, and Christopher piled up his purchases neatly, and thought, with satisfaction, of this very unexpected meeting with an old friend. He glanced at his grandfather; but seeing that he was still absorbed in his paper, and had apparently heard nothing of the conversation, he did not speak to him. Chris felt so happy about seeing a Maybury friend that he would have been glad to share his pleasure with his grandfather. There was no one else to speak to about it, for Thomas was travelling in another car, so there was nothing to do but wait until George appeared again, which Chris hoped might soon be the case.

George Smith was a boy who had lived at Maybury in somewhat peculiar circumstances. He was several years older than Christopher, and was now apparently engaged in making his fortune—or, at least, in earning a living. Being a "railroad man" sounded so very grand and grown-up that Chris felt distinctly impressed. George at one time was very poor. His mother had died at Maybury the preceding summer, and his sister

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Lucy had gone to live with an aunt, Miss Lucetta Smith, who was also the aunt of the Rachel Amy Martin, whom Chris and Betty had spoken of. Christopher thought it all over while he looked out of the window. He wondered if the Smiths and Martins still lived in the house that was divided in half by a wire netting, and he smiled when he remembered the fright he had had in that very house when the wire screen was being put up by the man who had been so unkind to him before his accident. It seemed so strange that he had ever been afraid of Peter Snell, now that he was so safe in the guardianship of his grandfather. He peeped around the back of his grandfather's chair, and saw that he had finished the financial page and was reading the news of the day, so he ventured to stretch out his hand and pat the old man's arm on the side nearer the window, where nobody would see him.

"What do you want, boy?" asked General Keith, not looking around.

"Nothing," said Chris. "I just thought I'd feel you. I'm glad I live with you, grand." It was a pet name he used occasionally.

"Humph!" said General Keith, "I'm glad you do."

It was not much, but to both of them the words as well as the action meant a great deal. They understood each other perfectly.

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After awhile George Smith came through again. This time he carried a *St. Nicholas*. "Here you are, Chris," said he. "I say, will you give something to my sister Lucy? Don't let on to any one else. I can't write. I hate writin' worse than anything. You just tell her, will you, that you seen me, and I'm well, and gettin' along O. K., and I want you to give her this." He placed an envelope in Christopher's hand. "And you just keep quiet to everybody. It's five dollars," he whispered, leaning over him. "I've been savin' it up for Lucy. You tell her to go over to South Maybury and get anything she likes at the Boston Store—a dress, or a hat, or candy, or a diamond ring. Lucy always said she was going to have a diamond ring when she grew up."

"Can you get one for five dollars?" asked Chris, as he tucked the precious envelope into his safest pocket.

"Oh, I guess you can at the Boston Store in South Maybury," said George, laughing. "Maybe not the kind that would do for John D., but good enough for us. You tell her I'll be comin' to see her and Aunt Lucetta one of these days before summer's over, and I'll—"

"Christopher, who is this?"

The boys both started as the cold, high-bred tones fell on their ears. They had forgotten that

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they were on a train, that Chris was the grandson of the severe old General, that George was but a newsboy, and that business was business and possible purchasers were being kept waiting. "Oh, grandfather, I thought you were reading! I'm glad you're not. This is George Smith. I knew him very well when I lived at Toppan Farm, didn't I, George?"

"Humph!" said the General, but not in the same way in which he had said it a few minutes before when Chris patted his arm. "How do you do?" he said, with a barely perceptible nod.

Smith, who had rested his pile of books on the arm of Christopher's chair while they talked, picked them up, settled the strap, and prepared to pass on. "*Puck, Judge, Life!* All the comic papers! *Ladies' Home Journal* out to-day!" he called out, in a high, penetrating voice, as he walked down the aisle.

"It isn't worth while for you to greet everybody from Maybury as an intimate friend, Christopher," said General Keith.

"Well, no, I suppose not *intimate*," said Chris. "And I never was intimate with George, but he was a friend. All the Smith family were friends, but George went away after his mother died, so I didn't have a chance to get very intimate. The first time I ever knew George at all he picked me up when I had fallen down in the road. You

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know it used to be very hard for me to get up, grand, when I fell down—I mean when I was using crutches.”

“Humph!” said his grandfather.

“There!” exclaimed Chris, regretfully, “I never asked George if he noticed that I don’t use crutches any more.”

The General moved impatiently in his chair and opened another newspaper. “Read your magazine,” said he, “and don’t talk about your crutches. Why should you remember things that made you unhappy?”

Christopher laughed. “Oh, the crutches didn’t make me unhappy, grand,” he said. “I don’t believe I was ever so happy in my life as when I began to use them at the Home, and Jess and Agnes and everybody watching me to see how I got along. Crutches are pretty good things when you’ve only got one leg. But of course it’s much better not to have to use them, and I wish George had noticed.”

He settled back in his chair and turned over the pages of his magazines, hoping that George would return. But when he did, the news-agent passed by without stopping; in fact, he did not even glance at Christopher, which was disappointing. Chris remembered that George had always been very quick to take offence, and to keep at a distance if he thought that he was not

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welcome. He wished that he could make George understand that his grandfather was not really a cross person, that it was only a severe manner. The next time the news-agent came through he would certainly stop him and make known to him that a cane now occupied the place of the crutches, and that even a cane would not long be necessary. But just at the moment when the cry of "*Puck, Judge, Life*" again fell upon the ears of the passengers, General Keith wheeled his chair around toward the window and engaged his grandson in conversation. It was impossible for Christopher to turn away from him to hail George, so the last opportunity passed by, for the boy did not go through the car again, and at the next stopping-place Chris saw him out on the platform of the station, evidently awaiting a train that would carry him back to Boston. He looked up at Christopher's face in the window, however, glanced at General Keith in the place in front, and, seeing that the old gentleman was absorbed in his papers again, he stepped close to the car. Chris opened his window.

"Don't tell anybody but Lucy," said Smith. "Promise!"

"I promise," said Chris. "I'll give it to her as soon as I can. George, did you notice—" And then the train began to move. "Good-bye!" shouted Chris. "It was George Smith," he said

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to his grandfather, who looked around at this. "He goes back to Boston now. Isn't it splendid he has steady work, grandfather? I am sure you would like George if you only knew him better."

"It is a privilege I can get along without," replied General Keith.

At last the long day in the cars drew to a close, and they were now approaching Maybury. "There's the lake!" exclaimed Chris. "The first time—" Then he remembered, and was silent. He had been about to refer to his first visit to Maybury, to his first sight of Maybury Lake; but he bethought himself in time that his grandfather strongly objected to being reminded of the fact that it was not he who had found Christopher and brought him up to Maybury from the city and the Home where he had lived. It was Mr. Toppan, of Toppan Farm—or "Uncle Dan," as Chris called him.

When the train stopped and they stepped upon the platform, there was Mr. Toppan himself standing among the group of men who were always at the station at this hour.

"Uncle Dan!" called out Christopher. "Oh, I'm so *glad* to see you!" He went quickly to him, and the tall farmer stooped over and took him in his arms.

"My little son of sunshine!" said Daniel Top-

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pan. "My little son of sunshine! Where are the crutches, boy?"

"Gone!" laughed Chris. "Don't need crutches any more. I've got two legs now nearly as good as anybody's — not quite. See me!" And he marched up and down the platform.

All the other men came forward and shook hands with him. He was a great favorite in Maybury, and even their awe of the General did not deter them from welcoming and congratulating the lame boy. General Keith had passed them all with a curt nod except Mr. Toppan. He had paused long enough to shake hands with him and inquire for Mrs. Toppan.

"The boy will come to see you soon," he said as he entered his carriage, which was drawn up at the other side of the station. "Come, Christopher, the horses don't like the train," he added. And in a moment they were off, the spirited horses prancing and dancing along the dusty country road.

"The old General's as proud as ever," said the postmaster, as he shouldered the mail-bag and started for the store—"proud as ever; but he don't seem to have had much effect that way on Chris."

"As nice a boy as ever was," replied Sam Wilson, the village humorist, who was the postmaster's usual companion. "Bright, too. Do

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you mind the time Tim Tarleton tried to make him tell what he was carryin' in his basket to the Widder Martin? Poor Tim! Guess he wishes by this time *he* didn't have the widder's baskets to kerry!"

Mr. Toppan walked slowly homeward. He did not usually frequent the station at this hour, but the longing to see Chris had brought him there. All the village had known that General Keith was expected to arrive that night.

"There never was a boy like him," said Daniel Toppan, aloud. There was no one near to hear him, now that he had turned off from the main street of the village. The dust left by the wagon with General Keith's trunks still lingered in the air, for the road led beyond the Toppan farm to Keith Hall—"never was nor never will be. If it makes me ache like this to have him come back and not belong to us, how will it make Marthy feel?"

Marthy was Mrs. Toppan. They had wished to adopt Christopher until it was discovered that he was the General's grandson, after Daniel had brought him to Maybury from the Home and he had passed the summer at the farm.

Mrs. Toppan was on the piazza when the boy drove past. He leaned forward and waved his cap. Then he turned to his grandfather. "Please let me get out. Please, please, grand! James,

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stop. Grand, you'll let James stop while I speak to her?"

The carriage came to a halt a short distance beyond the house, and Christopher climbed down. If his grandfather objected, he did not say so. Mrs. Toppan came quickly across the grass.

"I'm coming to see you to-morrow," said Chris, after he had kissed her again and again, and while her arms were still around him, "but when I saw you I just couldn't wait. And I don't use crutches any more, you see. Isn't that splendid? And I'm to have a pony of my own. And I've seen Betty, and they're coming to Maybury soon, and—and—oh, I'm glad to get back! I'm glad to see you, auntie!"

"Come, Christopher!" called General Keith.

"There, go, child. Don't keep him waiting, but come when you can," whispered Mrs. Toppan.

She stood looking up the road long after the carriage had passed out of sight and the wagon with the baggage had rumbled by. Then she turned and went back to her rocking-chair on the piazza. She was knitting quietly when her husband came into sight.

"Did you see him?" asked Mr. Toppan, speaking with unaccustomed eagerness. "Did he see you? Did he bow?"

"Bow! Dan'el Toppan! He had the carriage stop, and he got out and ran to meet me. There's

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no change in him except for the better. All the money in the world couldn't spoil him."

"That's true," said Daniel, sorting the mail he had brought. "Nothing for you, Marthy. Yes, that's very true. And the General? What did he do?"

"Oh, he bowed very politely, same as he always does. He was in a hurry, though, to get home, but that was natural enough. Chris says he'll be here to-morrow. Seems as if I just couldn't wait. I'll go tell Anna about his stopping the carriage." And she went into the house to share her joy with the hired girl.

VII

KEITH HALL, General Keith's home at Maybury, was justly celebrated for its beauty in all that part of the State. The grounds, which were many acres in extent, were kept at the highest point of cultivation. Those near the house consisted of lawns and gardens, while farther away there were groves of stately trees, woods, fields, and orchards. The General was especially interested in the growing of roses, and it had been a keen delight to him to recognize in Christopher an inherited love of flowers. This, with his musical taste and his desire to ride, pleased the grandfather, who cared for just those things. He unconsciously assumed that they would feel alike about everything else. He decided that the boy resembled him precisely, and he systematically treated him as he would wish to be dealt with himself, making no allowance for the difference in years, nor for the traits which Christopher had inherited from others who were equally near him in blood.

The new pony which had been promised to

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Chris was already in the stable, and within half an hour of his arrival he was in the saddle. This was not the first time he had been on horseback, for he had taken lessons while they were travelling abroad, and now he rode up and down the avenue and around the circle where the road swept up to the house with the ease of an accustomed horseman. The General stood on the steps of the piazza and watched him, while a group of stablemen gathered at a little distance.

"Sit a little straighter," called out General Keith, "and keep a light hand on the bridle! Your horse has a good mouth. Don't spoil it."

"Strikes me the old gentleman's pretty hard to please," said Hooker, a new man on the place.

"Oh, that's only the General's way," replied James, the coachman, in the same low tone. "He's that proud of the boy he can scarcely hold it, but he wouldn't let on he was for nothin'. It takes a mighty good bit of work to get any praise out of the General, but he's a good master, all the same. He just worships that boy, and no wonder."

"Makin' up for lost time, maybe," said Hooker, who, like every one else, knew the story.

"He's the best horse I ever knew!" cried Christopher, riding up to the steps.

"How many have you known?"

"Oh, ever so many! All the farm-horses and

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old Jerry at Toppan Farm, and those we rode in Europe, and the carriage-horses and your Angus. I like Peter better than any of them. I don't like his name, though. Do you think he'd feel badly, grand, if I were to change his name? You know that person was named Peter."

"I know," said the General, hastily. "By all means, change it. Call him anything you like. Better come in now."

"I'll think it over," said Chris, as he dismounted and stood patting the little bay's smooth neck and stroking his velvet nose. "I'll give you the nicest name I can think of, dearest," he whispered, "and then you won't be at all sorry you had to change it—only proud."

He watched Hooker lead the horse away, and then he followed his grandfather into the house. Presently they were seated at the dinner-table, the General at the head and Christopher at the foot, with a man behind each chair, just as they did in New York. This had impressed Christopher deeply when he first came to live with his grandfather, accustomed, as he was, to the farm-house table, and before that to a life that was yet more destitute of style and luxury; but now he had become used to wealth and grandeur, and he took it all as a matter of course. There had been so many changes in the circumstances of his short life that anything was possible.



"'I'LL GIVE YOU THE NICEST NAME I CAN THINK OF, DEAREST,' HE
WHISPERED"

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Thus far nothing had been permanent. He sometimes wondered if life as it was now would continue long. This crossed his mind as he ate his fruit at the end of dinner. The servants had left the room.

"If I have to go from here I think I'll be a railroad man, too," he said, with a suddenness that was a bit startling to his grandfather.

"What do you mean?" asked General Keith, putting down his empty coffee-cup. "Go from here?"

"I might have to, grandfather. I've changed lots of times. And if I have to change again I think I'll be a railroad man, and sell books and papers on trains. I might go into partnership with George Smith, and perhaps I'd get to be a conductor after awhile."

"Do you realize that I am your grandfather—that you are my grandson?"

"Why, yes, grand, of course. But, you see, I've always been that, and yet I have been very, *very* poor, and I might get poor again, and then I'd be older, so I would have to work, and that's what I mean."

"Christopher"—the old man's voice, usually so hard and cold, was tender—"Chris, my boy, don't speak so. You will always live with me now, and when I die, if you have been a good boy and have always done as I said, my money

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will be yours—the greater part of it. Your work will be to take care of it properly.”

Christopher looked around the room, at the silver on the sideboard, the pictures on the walls, the glass and silver on the table at which they sat, and through the open door of the dining-room into the music-room beyond. It had never occurred to him before that some day all this might be his. He was very ignorant, in spite of his experience with trouble.

“You are very kind, grand,” said he, at last.

“Kind? Why, you’re my own flesh and blood, boy.”

Christopher was silent for a moment.

“What are you thinking of?” demanded the General.

“I was thinking— Oh, grandfather, you would rather I didn’t say it!”

“I insist upon your telling me.”

“I was thinking perhaps mother and father wouldn’t have—have been so sick—if—if you had only found me sooner, dear grandfather. It was such a pity you couldn’t find us when we needed you so much. But, grand, I don’t see why you feel so very badly about it. It isn’t as if you hadn’t tried to find us. That would have been awful.”

The old General rose from his seat and walked quickly to one of the windows. Chris caught a

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glimpse of his face as he did so, and the boy left his place also, and, following him, he thrust his hand into that of his grandfather.

"Don't look so, grand!" he said, looking up at him. "It isn't as if you hadn't tried."

General Keith was silent. He was a brave man in battle, and men feared him in the ordinary transactions of daily life, but he lacked the moral courage to confess to this little boy, who loved and trusted him, that he not "tried" in time.

The next morning dawned bright and warm. It was early in April—so early that up in this New England hill country there were yet but few signs of green. But spring was coming. There was the softer air, the smell of earth, the intangible something that whispers of change and sends a thrill of expectation, half-glad, half-sad, through all who truly live. Chris felt it, although he could not have described the feeling, as he rode slowly away from Keith Hall that April morning on his way to fulfil his promise to George Smith. That part of his errand he was obliged to keep a secret from his grandfather, for he had promised to speak of George's gift to no one but his sister. He had obtained permission to go to Toppan Farm, and he intended to continue on from there to the village. He would tell his grandfather afterward where he had been. Ben accompanied him, the groom whose especial

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business was to be this very duty of riding with Chris and taking entire charge of his horse. He had been brought from New York by James, the coachman, and therefore knew nothing of the country about Maybury.

There was a great deal to be seen as well as said at the farm. It was necessary to go all over the house and barn, speak to each person and each horse, look at the cows, visit the hen-house, and even call upon the pigs—not to speak of the long talk with Mrs. Toppan and Anna, and with Mr. Toppan and the hired men—closely accompanied through it all by Dandy, the dog, who was overjoyed at seeing Chris once more, and never left him for an instant. An hour passed very quickly to Christopher but not to Ben, who walked the horses up and down the road, and longed for a New York life once more. At last Chris remembered that he had another call to make, and mounting his pony, which had already been displayed to the admiring eyes of all his friends, he rode off in the direction of the village, turning in the saddle to wave his riding-stick in farewell as he did so.

"Well, well, it's just too wonderful!" said Mrs. Toppan, as she stood looking after him as he rode away. "When I think of that poor, thin little fellow on crutches who came here last summer, without a friend or a penny to his name, and now

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to see that fine young gentleman riding his own horse and his own servant riding behind, and all in this short time—why, Dan’el it’s—it’s wonderful!”

Mr. Toppan did not speak for a moment. Then, as he turned to go back to his work, he said, quietly: “It certainly is, Marthy. And it makes me kind of tremble when I think how near I was to keeping him out of it.”

“No, you wasn’t, Dan’el. I know you better than you know yourself, I guess. It was just a temptation sent to try you. We think oftentimes we’re near yielding, but those who love us know we’re strong enough to stand it.”

Daniel Toppan turned again and came back to her. He put his arm through hers, and they walked together to the kitchen door. “I guess,” said he, “it’s that very faith in us that those who love us have that keeps us from doing wrong things mighty often. It ain’t so much our strength as it is theirs.”

“Well, I’m no hand at reasoning a thing out,” replied Mrs. Toppan, “but I maintain there’s strength somewhere where there’s love, for that’s the strongest thing in the world.”

“You’re right there, Marthy.” And then he went out to his plough, which he had left in a distant field when he came in to see Christopher, and Mrs. Toppan returned to her housework.

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Chris rode to the village, and after stopping in front of the store to greet the postmaster and other friends, he crossed the road, and, dismounting, entered the side gate of the house where Lucy Smith lived with her aunt Lucetta. There was a curious history attached to this house. Miss Lucetta Smith had lived in it all her life, as had also her sister, Mrs. Martin. The preceding summer Miss Smith had brought home the children of a brother, and Mrs. Martin, objecting to this, had caused to be built a partition of wire netting, dividing the house exactly in half from the cellar to the roof. On one side of this she lived with her daughter Rachel Amy, and kept a sharp and constant watch upon the doings of her relatives in the other half of the house, although she never spoke to them.

Chris found Lucy alone. Miss Lucetta had gone to South Maybury to do some shopping, and had left her niece to look after things at home. As it was Saturday, she was not at school. It was, therefore, an excellent opportunity to give Lucy the envelope containing George's five-dollar bill, which he did with many injunctions of secrecy.

"Can't I even tell Aunt Lucetta?" asked Lucy. "I do wish I could, for she would be so glad about it. She worries so about George, and wonders how he is really getting along."

"He said not to say a word," replied Chris-

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topher, very earnestly. "You're to get a hat or a dress over at the Boston Store in South Maybury, or a diamond ring—anything you want."

They had stepped out into the half hall while he was speaking. Lucy was quite certain that her aunt, Mrs. Martin, was standing on her side of the netting in the hall above, so she made no further remark beyond warmly expressing her thanks to Chris.

"I am very much obliged," she said, very earnestly. She was an old-fashioned little girl of ten or eleven. "You are very good. I won't get a diamond ring, though, because there are other things I need a great deal more."

"I don't believe you could get a diamond ring for five dollars," laughed Chris. "But there are lots of things you can get, and you will tell me what you choose, won't you, because I shall want to know?"

"Yes," said Lucy, "I certainly will; and I'm very, very much obliged."

"I'm going in to see Rachel Amy now," said Chris.

"Well, you must go out our side door, and go around to the front and ring their bell."

"All right. Good-bye, Lucy."

And presently he was ringing the bell of the door on the other side of which he had been stand-

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ing but a few seconds earlier. It was opened almost before his hand had left the bell by Rachel Amy Martin. She was a tall girl with thick brown hair, which she wore in a very smooth braid, and her face was attractive without being pretty. It was alight now with pleasure as she greeted Christopher.

"I knew it was you," she said. "Mother heard you when you were in at Aunt Lucetta's. So you went to see Lucy first? However, I don't care as much as mother does. Be careful what you say in there, Chris. We hear every word—at least, mother does." She led him into the parlor, which with the front door had fallen to the share of Mrs. Martin in the division of the house. She spoke hurriedly and in a low voice, glancing as she did so at the door into the hall.

"You've got a horse, haven't you?" she continued. "What's his name?"

"He hasn't any name—at least, I don't like the one he has, and I'm going to change it. Do you know a good one?"

"Oh, why don't you call him Julius Cæsar, or Ivanhoe, or Richard Cœur de Lion, or— Oh, I know: call him either Napoleon or the Duke of Wellington, I don't care which," said Rachel Amy, who was fond of history and also of Scott, and who seemed to be of an impartial turn of mind.

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Christopher was doubtful about all of these, and there was a lurking desire in his mind to submit the decision to Betty Hamilton when she came. He felt that Betty might be more original than Rachel Amy.

"I don't care much for Napoleon," he said, "and Duke of Wellington would be such a very long name for such a little horse, and so would most of the others. I think I'll wait a little before I decide, but if you think of any more, Rachel Amy, I wish you would tell me."

"Brownie is a nice name."

"That is the name of Betty Hamilton's dog, only they call him Brown usually. Did you know they were coming here to spend the whole summer in their own house?"

"I guess everybody knows that." Rachel Amy spoke without enthusiasm, and her manner might almost be called "snubby." "Is her hair as red as ever?"

This was an old point of difference. "I don't call it so very red, but I don't think it has changed any. Don't you want to come out and see my pony? I'm afraid I've got to go home now."

"You haven't stayed so very long. You went to see the people next door first, didn't you?" Her mother always insisted that Miss Lucetta and Lucy should be mentioned only as "the people next door."

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"Next door?" repeated Chris, somewhat puzzled.

"Yes. You know. In there."

"But it's the same house."

Before Rachel Amy could reply, Mrs. Martin came into the room. "It is next door," she said, with great asperity, "and I'll thank you not to forget it."

"How do you do, Mrs. Martin?" said Chris. He held out his hand and smiled at her. Mrs. Martin's face relaxed in spite of herself. She was a gloomy, disagreeable-looking person, and she rarely smiled. Long practice in saying and thinking unpleasant things had dragged down the corners of her mouth and ploughed deep lines between her eyes. She was a person who went through life with the firm conviction that she was very much to be pitied.

"Well," she said, "ain't you lucky! I guess you was born with a silver spoon in your mouth if ever anybody was. Got a horse of your own, like a little prince. And able to do charity and give presents, too. But I'll thank you not to be visitin' both houses. If you're bringin' presents there, you'll kindly not come here."

"Mother!" exclaimed Rachel Amy, her color deepening.

"Both houses?" repeated Chris, somewhat puzzled. "Oh, you mean your sister's half."

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"I mean that Miss Lucetta Smith's. She ain't my sister any longer, I'd have you to understand."

Christopher stood looking at her. "How very strange it is," he said, at last. "I would give anything in the world to have a sister or a brother all my own. I think I would rather have a sister, because girls are nice, and I'd like to take care of her always and love her. I would a great deal rather have one than a horse or any of the things grandfather gives me. We would always play together, and when we grew up I'd have her then, too, for my own. And you have one right here in the same house and you don't want her. It seems very strange. Do you suppose it is always that way, Mrs. Martin?"

"What way?" She spoke almost against her will. She would have liked to believe that the boy was preaching to her. Then she could have resented it. But it was impossible to think this. She could see that he was merely thinking over the situation, and it surprised him.

"Why, that what we have we don't want, and we want what we don't have."

"I can't answer for others, but I know it's always been pretty much that way with me."

"I can't understand it," said Chris. "Not when it's a sister. I should think you'd be so glad of her you wouldn't mind at all about George

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and Lucy. I should love to have George and Lucy, too. It must be splendid to have relations. But I have my grandfather. Once, you know, I didn't have him. But oh, Mrs. Martin, a sister is such a nice person to have belonging to you! It does seem such a waste not to be friends with her. Don't you think you really could?"

"No!" cried Mrs. Martin, with vehemence.

Chris moved toward the door. "It is very strange," said he again. "It isn't as if it were a thing you could buy."

Rachel Amy followed him out of the front door. "Don't mind her," she whispered. "I don't think she's feeling very well. Oh, Chris, what a beautiful horse! And is he really all your own? And don't you have to use crutches any more? Oh, I'm so glad!"

"I was waiting for you to notice about the crutches," said he, much gratified.

"It's perfectly splendid," said Rachel Amy. "Doesn't it seem very queer to be living with General Keith, Chris? Aren't you afraid of him?"

Christopher laughed. "Afraid of grandfather? Why, of *course* not!"

"Well, most folks are."

"I never was, even before I knew he was my grandfather."

Christopher mounted his horse and rode away, and Rachel Amy stood watching him just as the

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Toppans had done, and as the men over at the store were also doing. It seemed so wonderful to them all. In the course of time they became accustomed in Maybury to the sight of Christopher on horseback, but at first it was the chief subject of interest and conversation.

When Rachel Amy went into the house her mother came out of the parlor. She, too, had been watching through the crack of the shade, which she had drawn slightly aside. The shades were seldom raised in the parlor for fear the sun would spoil the carpet.

"Well," she said, "did he give you a present, too?"

"Oh no, mother!"

"Well, I never! And you were always more his friend than that little minx in next door. Now, what has she done, I'd like to know, that would cause him to bring her a present of five dollars, and tell her to go buy something over to the Boston Store? Charity, I suppose. That's all. But if I was Miss Lucetta Smith I'd be above lettin' my niece and adopted daughter receive charity. To think of all the money Miss Lucetta Smith has got laid away as ought to have been yours, Rachel Amy, as much her niece as any one, not to say more, having lived together all your life and seemin' to set such store by you! And all I did for her, too!"

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Rachel Amy gathered her courage in both hands, as it were. "Aunt Lucetta is just as fond of me as she ever was, mother, and you know it, and she loves you, too, as much as ever. It's you, mother! It's you keeps up the quarrel. Oh, mother, won't you take the netting down and be friends again? Oh, mother, mother, please take the netting down!"

Mrs. Martin grasped her daughter's arms and shook her slightly. "Never!" she said. "*Never!* And don't you ever speak of it again. There, I've got that pain again. You've got to keep quiet, Rachel Amy, and not excite me. I can't stand it."

"What's the matter, mother? I didn't know you had any pain."

"Oh, it's nothing. It's gone now. But don't you mention any such subject as that. It brings it right on. Do you hear?"

"Yes, mother," said the girl.

She wondered if her mother were really ill. Certainly her face looked white and drawn; but always she had made much of her ailments, and experience had taught Rachel Amy that it was never worth while to be unduly alarmed. She went back to her work with a heavy heart. Life had become very sad for Rachel Amy, for she loved her aunt Lucetta.

VIII

ON the first day of June the Hamilton family arrived at Maybury Centre and established themselves in the old farm-house which Mr. Hamilton had bought, and which had been put into complete order for his use. It was half-past five in the afternoon when the train drew up at the little station. The usual crowd of loungers was awaiting it, and when the large party from New York alighted, they, the village worthies, felt that they had not waited in vain. This evening there was really something to see. There were Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, Florence, Charles, Pauline, Betty, Betty's dog, and several persons in addition who were designated as "the hired help." The coming of the Hamiltons had long been anticipated by Maybury, and the realization of these anticipations was all that could be desired. There was certainly something to look at.

The purchase of the old Pringle place by a New York man had been one of the sensations of the year. The residents of the village felt that anything was now possible in its future.

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The value of property would go up with leaps and bounds. This was but the beginning of good things. Until recently Maybury had remained undiscovered by city people. General Keith had owned his large and beautiful estate there for many years, to be sure, but the summer boarder, that advance-guard of city fashion, had not as yet descended upon the place. With the exception of the Hamiltons themselves, scarcely any one of their kind had visited Maybury, and therefore it still retained the quaintness and charm which has now vanished from most country villages.

All the "teams" available were soon at the service of the strangers, and presently a procession of carry-alls and buggies drove along the main street, and, passing the post-office, the hotel, and the drug store, turned off upon the road which led past the Toppan Farm to Keith Hall. Very soon, however, they took another turn to the left, and, skirting the edge of Maybury Lake, they drove through the woods and then emerged upon an open road, on either side of which the fields and apple orchards gave evidence of the close proximity of a farm. At last they turned in at a gate, and following an entrance road, grass-grown and rutty, they finally drew up at the side of a long, rambling house, which, with ells and out-houses and barn closely adjoining, seemed to

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be of considerable size. It consisted of but two stories, but it was so long that it covered a large amount of space. It had been in great need of repair when Mr. Hamilton bought it, but now, with fresh paint outside and with all the comforts that modern life can give within doors, it had become a charming summer home. Nothing had been done to alter the appearance of age. The paint was white, both outside and in. The old doors, with their quaint glass handles or still more ancient latches, the high chimney-shelves above the great fireplaces, the wainscoting, the little cupboards that one came upon in all sorts of unexpected places, the steep stairs, and even the faint, intangible smell that clings to an old farmhouse—all were there, as well as some of the ancient furniture which had been bought with the house, and which Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton considered the most important part of the purchase. The approach to the farm was up a gentle but long incline, consequently the house lay a number of feet higher than the village, and the view from the piazzas as well as from the upper windows was very fine. The lake, which was quite a large body of water, irregular in shape and long rather than broad, was near at hand, a steep path leading directly down to its shores. Beyond the gleaming water was the railroad, and beyond that were woods and valleys and hills.

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Pauline lingered alone on the west porch. The others had all hurried into the house, eager to explore its undiscovered resources; but she, with the instinct of the artist, stayed to watch the changing colors of lake and sky, unheeding the arrival of trunks or the tramping of feet, the shouts of the delighted family and the excited barking of Brown, who felt that his travels now were over. She had her travelling-bag in her hand, and presently she sat down on the steps, and, opening it, searched in its depths until she found a little blank-book. In this she wrote a description of the view as her eyes saw it. She did not attempt to put it into rhyme or verse. That would come later. It was necessary to her, however, to express her joy in what she saw in written language.

She was interrupted by Charles.

"I say," said he, "isn't this corking? Paul, you'd better stop scribbling and go up-stairs. If you don't, Betty will have grabbed the whole place there."

Pauline felt that it really did not much matter what Betty did if only she herself could look at the view; this was her first thought. But presently the practical side of her nature asserted itself, and she went up to investigate for herself. The room which she and Betty were to share was on the corner of the house directly above where

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she had been sitting on the porch. The windows, therefore, commanded the same view as that which she had been watching. It was a large room, with a high white wainscoting and an old-fashioned blue-and-white paper. The two beds were on opposite sides of the room, and were small and painted white. There was a large fireplace, and on either side of the chimney was a cupboard. The chairs were old-fashioned and stiff, with high backs, and there was a chest of drawers for each girl with a small glass above it. There was a straw matting on the floor, and upon it were oblong rugs made of woven rags. Florence's room was next to theirs, on the side of the house, and was not unlike it in general appearance, although somewhat smaller. On the opposite side of the little hall was Mrs. Hamilton's room, and next to hers the guest-chamber. The boys' room was in the ell, as was also an extra room for their friends. The servants had another ell to themselves, over the kitchen, and a room that was now to be used as a laundry.

"You take the right side of everything and I'll take the left," said Betty, briskly, when Pauline came in, "just as we always do." She was hurrying about in a very business-like way, unpacking and arranging her possessions. "Aren't those window-seats splendid? There's only one table. Who will have it?"

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"You can have the table if you will let me have this western window with the view for my own town," replied Pauline.

"Can't I ever look out of it?"

"Oh yes, of course you can look out of it, but I want to own it and sit here when I like," said Pauline, gazing across the lake as she spoke.

"All right. I'd rather have the table than the view. I suppose you'll keep your ink and things on your window-sill."

This was a new thought to Pauline. In her anxiety to secure the view she had forgotten more practical advantages.

"Perhaps I can find an old desk somewhere," she said, after considering the matter. "You can have the table and that extra cupboard if you'll promise not to interfere with my having the whole of the desk, if I find one, and I keep the window."

"All right," agreed Betty. To her a table in the hand was worth far more than any desks in the bush.

And this important matter being settled, they went down-stairs to join the rest of the family at their first supper at the farm.

The next morning was even more wonderful to the Hamiltons than the night of their arrival. To wake up in the country, in rooms that were strange and yet their own; to look from the windows and see the bright June sun lighting up

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lake and pasture, garden and field, and shining upon a world so quiet and so peaceful, so far removed from the noisy traffic and turmoil of a great city; to feel the soft June breeze, to smell the sweet June perfumes, to hear the birds singing their June songs—could it be the world in which they had awakened only yesterday, the yesterday which now seemed weeks or months ago?

Pauline lingered over her dressing, for most of it was done at her favorite window, and it is not easy to button your boots or brush your hair when you are at the same time studying a distant landscape; but Betty wasted no precious moments in poetic meditations. She was soon ready for action, and with a parting injunction to Pauline to “hurry up and come down,” she left the room and began the day.

The first thing to be visited was the lake. It had been too late when they finished supper the night before—at least so her parents thought, not Betty—to descend the path, and therefore it must now be done at once. Betty had made many plans about the lake. There was to be a sail-boat, a row-boat, a canoe, and a motor-boat—according to Miss Betty. She loved the water, and had passed many of her summers at the seashore. A lake was but a poor substitute for an ocean, but better than no water at all, in which opinion Charles agreed with her. She found him

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already on the little strip of sandy beach at the foot of the path when she reached it.

"There's an old boat-house," he said, "and I mean to ask father to let me have a man to-day to help me and we'll try to put it into better shape. It needs shingling. There's an old boat here, too. Looks as if Noah had used it when he took Mrs. Noah rowing by moonlight. I shouldn't wonder if it were really about a hundred years old. Look at it, half full of water."

"When are the new boats coming?"

"Oh, we're only going to have one at first. Father says he's been spending so much on this place he'll have to go easy for a while. He's going to buy a good row-boat, and I'm going to put that money I've saved up into a canoe—that is, if I get any money on my birthday, next week, to help out."

"And aren't we going to have a sail-boat and a motor-boat?" asked Betty.

"Not this year, anyway, and I don't see what we want either for. There's a lot to do on land. It isn't like being on the coast, where you have to be on the water all the time if you want any fun."

Betty did not reply. This would have been a crushing disappointment to her had she been told of it in New York, but here on the spot, where, as Charles said, there was so much else to

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do, she really did not care. She was investigating the shore in the immediate vicinity of the path. Presently she gave a loud shout which evidently meant some great discovery.

"Charles, do come here! Quick! I've found—oh, Charles, I'm sure it's an underground passage!"

Charles was very busy with the old boat. "All right. It will keep," he replied.

"Oh, it's wonderful!" cried Betty. "I'm creeping in! It leads ever so far." Her voice grew fainter as she ventured farther into the opening.

Presently she emerged again. "I'm going to explore it 'way in," she said. "I would have now, only I thought it would soon be breakfast-time and I'm so hungry. It is most mysterious. You must look at it, Charles."

She finally persuaded him to leave the ancient boat and examine the opening. It was at the base of the steep bank, and seemed to have been made by man, not formed by nature. It was lined with stones, and the entrance was so overgrown with bushes that it would not be noticed by the casual visitor to the shore of the lake. Betty's sharp eyes, eager to find all that there was of interest, had seen it at once. Charles was distinctly impressed by her discovery.

"It is an underground passage," said he. "I shouldn't wonder if it led right up to the house."

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I bet they built it so as to escape from the Indians. This is such an old house it must have been built in the days of Indians. Don't say anything about it, Betty. We'll have some fun with it before we tell the others. We can play some joke on the maids, or something like that. Now don't tell!"

"Of course not," said Betty, promptly, delighted to have a secret with Charles, and equally pleased at his feeling that her find was of sufficient importance to be kept a secret.

And then the breakfast-bell was heard ringing, and they joyfully obeyed its summons and returned to the house. After breakfast it was necessary to decide about gardens, to divide up the land allotted to them for that purpose, and to choose whether they should raise flowers or vegetables. The barn had to be explored, the hennery investigated, the question of incubators inquired into (for Charles meditated making a fortune in selling eggs to his mother, and for a time an incubator seemed a better investment for idle money than a canoe), the shingling of the boat-house must be begun, and altogether there was so much to occupy every one that the underground passage was entirely forgotten, and neither Charles nor Betty thought of it again for a long time.

At about three o'clock that afternoon, when

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Mrs. Hamilton, after a busy morning, had gone to her room to rest, two figures were seen approaching by Florence and Pauline. They were those of a tall, thin woman, who walked with a hurried, nervous step, and a young girl of about Pauline's age. They came up the rough, grass-grown avenue which led to the house, and passing without a glance the end of the eastern porch, where the Hamilton girls were sitting, they went to the front door and rang the bell.

"Who can they be?" whispered Florence. "You go and see what they want, Paul; the maids are so busy." Florence was comfortably placed in the hammock, and thought it would be much easier for Pauline to rise than for her to do so. Besides, of what use would be a younger sister if not to go on errands?

Pauline laid aside her book and went around the corner of the house, accompanied by Brownie, barking violently at the strangers.

"Do you wish to see any of the family?" she asked.

Pauline was not pretty—in fact, she was considered rather plain in comparison with her two sisters; but her manner was so pleasant, her voice so cordial, and her eyes so friendly that most people found her very attractive. The young girl, who was no other than Rachel Amy Martin, looked at her with interest. She had not wished

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to come this afternoon because she did not care for Betty, but her mother had insisted that she should accompany her to make the call which Mrs. Martin had determined to pay without delay. She was glad that this was not Betty, and wondered if it could be a sister, and where Betty might be.

Mrs. Martin turned quickly and confronted Pauline.

"Well, I guess that's what we've come for," she replied, with her usual asperity. "I guess nothin' else would bring us up this hill. P'r'aps you thought we'd come to see some of the help. If so, you're mistaken. I'd thank you if you'd stop that dog barkin'. I'm Mrs. Martin, one of the Maybury Centre ladies, and I've come to call on Mrs. Hamilton. Bein' a stranger here, I thought she'd feel kind o' lonesome and I'd call without delay. Of course, it's my place to come first. It's etiquettical, and I always was one as paid great attention to what's etiquettical. Whatever my faults, I'm not caught nappin' that way. You're one of the hired help, I suppose. A half-grown girl can make herself real handy."

Pauline laughed. "I'm Pauline Hamilton," she said. "I will tell my mother you are here. Will you come in?"

Mrs. Martin was at first quite overcome at hav-

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ing mistaken a daughter of the house for "hired help." "But," as she said afterward, "who would have supposed that a young lady accustomed to New York city life would be in a plain chintz dress, as plain as a pike-staff, at three o'clock of an afternoon, which, as every one knows, is the proper hour for paying and receiving calls?"

She murmured an apology for her mistake and followed Pauline into the living-room, into which the front door opened. The room, which had once been the "best parlor" of the farm-house, had been thrown into one with the hall, making a very large room, from which the narrow, old-fashioned staircase led directly up to the second floor. Mrs. Martin looked about her with a critical eye. There was no plush-covered parlor set, no centre-table, no corner étagère, or what-not, as were to be found in all well-regulated best parlors. There was no melodeon, although there was an upright piano, which stood open, and upon the top of which there was not a single ornament.

"I presume they're not fixed up yet," remarked Mrs. Martin, audibly, to Rachel Amy. "That's one reason why I sh'd have preferred to call later; but I'd no intention of lettin' that Miss Lucetta Smith get ahead of me on this, as I've remarked before, Rachel Amy. That girl didn't look a mite like the red-headed one, did she? Well,

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it's real plain here, I must say. Look at those rugs! And as for that willer rocker, it couldn't have cost more'n—"

"Mother," whispered Rachel Amy, imploringly, "they can hear right up those stairs!"

Before her mother had time to reply, which, to judge from her expression, would have been done quickly and scathingly, Mrs. Hamilton came down the stairs in question.

"Mrs. Martin?" she said, cordially, as she shook hands. "And this must be your daughter, whom I have heard my Betty speak of. Your name is Rachel Amy, isn't it?"

Rachel Amy felt distinctly pleased that her name should be remembered, and she smiled at the lady who greeted her so kindly.

"You will like to go out on the piazza with Pauline, I am sure, while we elders sit inside. I don't know where Betty is. She has been out-of-doors all day, she is so glad to get to the country. Perhaps you can find her, Pauline, for I have no doubt Rachel Amy has come to see her."

"No matter about looking up Betty," said Rachel Amy, as the two girls left the room, "I'm just as pleased to call on you."

Pauline introduced her to Florence, and the three manufactured conversation on the porch while their mothers did the same in the house. At the end of half an hour Mrs. Martin rose to go.

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"I want you should come to a four-o'clock at my house," said she. "I'll send you a card when the time comes. I know what's the proper thing to do. I'm going to ask some of the Maybury Centre ladies to meet you—not all of 'em, by any means. I intend to pick and choose the best, and I shall invite a friend of mine from West Maybury. Mrs. Davis is one of my most intimate friends over there. She visits in New York city, and just as likely as not you've met before. I'd like your young folks to come, too. I'll send out cards."

She called Rachel Amy, and presently they were going down the avenue with the same hurried step with which they had come. Mrs. Hamilton watched them. She was on the porch with her daughters, and when the visitors were out of sight she turned to the girls with an amused face.

"What an extraordinary woman our first caller is!" she said. "She practically informed me that she was surprised to find me in a morning dress at this hour. I am afraid Maybury customs in the matter of dress are going to be more rigorous than those of New York. And she also told me that she was engaged to be married, but was in no hurry to change her state. Betty, here you are at last! Where have you been, child? You have missed a caller—two callers."

"Oh, I saw them," said Betty, as she came up the steep path from the lake. "It was Rachel

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Amy and her mother. That's the reason I stayed away."

"I like that Rachel Amy," said Pauline, thoughtfully. "She looks as if she didn't have much fun, and she felt so sorry because her mother made a mistake and thought I was one of the maids."

"We are all invited, or going to be invited, there to a 'four - o'clock,'" continued Mrs. Hamilton. "Only the best people are to be asked to meet us, and not 'that Miss Lucetta Smith,' who lives next door to the Martins. Who can she be? Some one quite beneath notice from a social standpoint, Mrs. Martin seems to think."

"Why, it is her own sister!" exclaimed Betty. "And they live in the same house with a wire netting between. They're the ones I told you about. She is engaged to Tim Tarleton, the man who drives a station carriage."

"We must go to the party," said Mrs. Hamilton. "I am quite curious to see the netting. That poor little Rachel Amy! I feel very sorry for her."

"So do I," said Pauline. "I mean to be friends with Rachel Amy."

"I wish you would," said Betty; "that would take her off my hands. I like Lucy Smith best, though she's a terrible coward, and behaved like a little goose once when we were caught in a bad

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scrape last year. But you're welcome to Rachel Amy."

"Let us do all we can for her," said their mother. "It is sad for a girl to be placed in her position."

"I suppose it is," assented Betty, "but there is something about Rachel Amy Martin that always makes me cross."

"Betty, isn't that unreasonable?"

"Or is it unusual?" added Florence. "So many people and things make you cross."

"It must run in the family," said Betty. "I take after my eldest sister."

Pauline laughed. "She's got you there, Flo."

"Children, I don't like to have you talk to one another in that way," said Mrs. Hamilton. "What would either one of you do if you had no brothers and sisters, and were alone with such a very disagreeable mother as Mrs. Martin seems to be? And perhaps she has had something in her life to make her so. You never can tell. Illness, or sorrow, or poverty, or disgrace of some sort may have soured and sharpened her. Any one of us might become like that if we met with great trouble, and had not sufficient strength of mind to stand up against it."

"Not you, darling mother!" exclaimed Pauline, going to her and giving her a hug. "You would only get lovelier and lovelier; wouldn't she, girls?"

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"Indeed she would!" said Florence and Betty together, in perfect harmony once more. Their little disagreements and differences never lasted long. The Hamiltons all loved one another dearly, and their disputes were only such as are bound to arise among a number of brothers and sisters who are growing up together, each with his or her own strong will, and with the first unfolding of a yet uncertain character.

"You flatter me, dear ones," said Mrs. Hamilton. "But I want you all to be good to that poor child. I feel so very sorry for her. I could see that she was afraid of her mother."

"I should think she would be," said Betty. "That Mrs. Martin is a perfectly awful person. Miss Lucetta Smith is very nice, and she and Rachel Amy used to be so fond of each other; and now, since Miss Lucetta adopted George and Lucy, poor Rachel Amy isn't allowed to speak to her. If Rachel Amy were not such a proud person, I suppose I should like her better. Of course, I am sorry for her. If her mother would only marry Tim Tarleton and go off somewhere, and leave Rachel Amy with her aunt Lucetta, how nice it would be! Yes, I feel very sorry for Rachel Amy. But she is so proud!"

"How do you mean?" asked Pauline.

"Well, I mean stuck-up — about her long braid, for instance. If I had a long braid of hair

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I never should mention to my dearest, most intimate friend how many twists there were in it. She did, almost the first time I ever saw her, and it was in Sunday-school." Betty shook her own curly head very wisely and with great superiority as she spoke.

"I don't think that was so dreadful," said Pauline, who had definitely established herself as the friend and champion of Rachel Amy.

"But she always acts so very stuck-up about everything. She makes you feel as if she thought herself ever so much *gooder* than you are."

"Oh, that may be your imagination, Betty," said her mother. "But I believe we are going to have another visitor—two, in fact: General Keith and Christopher! Betty, go tell your father General Keith is here." And she added, in a lower tone: "I shall have to dress early in May-bury, I see."

General Keith and his grandson were on horse-back. The boy had expressed a desire to ride over to see the Hamiltons, and to his surprise, the General had said that he would go also. He knew that his grandfather, not being of a genial disposition, was averse to making calls, and he was glad that he evidently intended being on terms of friendliness, if not intimacy, with the Hamiltons. He supposed that it was because of the connection by marriage between them

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and the family of his grandfather, for Mr. Hamilton's sister had married Ludovic Lewis, his grandmother's nephew. It did not occur to him that General Keith was making this great effort and altering his usual habits solely on his account. If the boy wished to go the General would go, too. He could not bear to have him out of his sight even for an hour or so. Therefore, the two came together; and while Chris went off with Pauline and Betty to look for Mr. Hamilton and Charles, General Keith talked in his stately, courteous way to Mrs. Hamilton and Florence, and impatiently awaited the boy's return. It was evident to Mrs. Hamilton, who was a keen observer, that the old man had become completely absorbed in his grandson, or, rather, that he intended to absorb the boy in himself, and she felt a pang of pity for the child, just as she had felt for Rachel Amy, although the circumstances of the two were so different.

Mr. Hamilton and Charles were found down at the boat-house. They were shingling it themselves, and Mr. Hamilton was so pleased with his carpentry that he forsook it rather unwillingly to go to his visitor. Charles was too much absorbed in it to pay much attention to the children, and presently they left him, and, after exploring the shore of the lake and looking at the boat with a strong desire to try it in spite of

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its leakiness, they climbed the steep path again, and Betty and Chris went to the big barn while Pauline returned to the house.

"Has Rachel Amy been here?" asked Christopher, as soon as he was alone with Betty.

"Yes. How did you know it?"

"We met them on the road. I thought they must have been here. Mrs. Martin hates me now. She just glared at me, and she wouldn't let Rachel Amy speak to me."

"Why not?"

"Because she thinks I gave Lucy Smith a present. She came up to see grandfather about it."

"Why, Chris! What do you mean?" asked Betty, deeply interested. "Let's sit down here on this pile of hay, and you tell me all about it. Here is some candy I got in the village—sassafras sticks; it is lovely. Now go on and tell me."

"I'm afraid I can't. You see, it's a great secret," said Chris, accepting a stick of candy with manifest pleasure.

"A secret? Aren't you going to tell me? Why, Christopher Lovel! And I tell you all my secrets (at least, I did last summer), and I mean to this year, too — that is, if you will do the same."

"But I didn't tell this even to grandfather,

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because I had promised I wouldn't. He trusted me, and said he wouldn't ask me any more if I had promised; but he didn't like it very much."

"But what did you do that Mrs. Martin didn't like? That can't be a secret, if she knows it and went to see your grandfather. You can at least tell me that much."

"Grandfather said it was all nonsense. He was very angry with Mrs. Martin. The day after we came up here I took something to Lucy Smith. I had been asked by some one to give it to her, and Mrs. Martin heard me and thought I was giving charity, as she called it, to Lucy, and she came up and told grandfather that I had. Grandfather was very angry at being interrupted. We were playing the violin when she came. He told her I was at liberty to give away as much as I liked; but afterward he asked me about it, and didn't like it because I couldn't explain it all to him. However, he said he trusted me."

"I think I know what it was," said Betty. "It was something George sent Lucy."

"Why, Betty!" cried Chris. "How did you guess it? You are the most wonderful person!"

"Oh, I saw George Smith yesterday when we changed cars. He was waiting to go back on the train to Boston. I didn't have time to speak to him. So now I have guessed this much, I don't

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see why you shouldn't tell me more. I'll be very careful never to tell."

Christopher considered the matter. "Mrs. Martin is telling the whole village that Miss Lucetta and Lucy are living on charity," he said, at last. "I feel so sorry, and if I could only see George or get word to him somehow I should ask him if I might tell."

"You leave me to manage it," said Betty. "I can guess the whole thing. He sent Lucy some money by you, and Mrs. Martin overheard you, and thought you were giving Lucy money yourself. She is an awful woman, Chris. My mother thinks we ought to do something for Rachel Amy, and I am going to think up something—I'm not quite sure what."

"I don't see what we can do. Her mother is with her all the time. But, Betty, you mustn't do anything to manage that about George. You know I promised him, and I haven't told you now; you only guessed it. Please don't do anything, will you?"

"Oh, well, not if you don't want me to. But there is something else I must do. I don't care much for Rachel Amy, but I should like to rescue her from her misery."

"Betty, how could you do anything?"

"I don't know. Maybe I'll think of something."

Chris looked at her as though he considered her

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quite capable of accomplishing even such an undertaking as that would be.

"Didn't George look nice in his uniform?" said she, presently.

"Yes, it must be great fun to be a railroad man. I mean to, if I ever have to work for my living."

"And sell papers on the train? As if your grandfather would let you do that! Why, Chris, he has loads and loads of money."

"I might have to," said the boy. "But there's grandfather calling. It must be time to go. What shall I call my pony, Betty? I have been waiting for you to come to name him."

"Have you, really? Well, I've thought of a name right away."

"What is it? I knew you'd know of a good one."

"I never heard of a horse that was named this, but I like it. Will you promise to call him by it, whether you like it or not?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Chris, recklessly.

"Then his name is to be Sassafra's."

"Sassafra's! Why, Betty, what a name for a horse!"

"You promised, and it is a splendid name—so hissy and stingy. You'd know a horse named Sassafra's was a fast one. Here, take another stick."

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"All right," said Christopher, slowly. "It's a queer one, but I rather like it." He accepted the candy, and presently he had mounted his pony, and he and his grandfather rode away through the woods.

IX

“CHRISTOPHER,” said General Keith one morning, “there is something I wish to speak to you about very particularly.”

The boy was sitting on the piazza steps. A humming-bird was in the honeysuckle, and while he watched it he wondered what he should do that morning. He wished very much to drive over to the Hamiltons'. His grandfather had given him a pretty runabout, and his chief desire now was to show it to Betty, who had not yet seen it. He was afraid that if he suggested going his grandfather would accompany him or would send Ben with him, and he liked occasionally to be independent of others. Calling at the Hamiltons' with his grandfather was very different from a long morning of play or work with Betty and Pauline, and occasionally Charles. Chris felt a deep admiration for Charles, and was always pleased when the older boy vouchsafed him even a small amount of attention. He did not feel at all in the mood for discussing matters of importance with his grandfather. On a beautiful

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summer morning like this there was so much that was more entertaining to do.

"Do you, grandfather?" he said, without turning round. "I wonder if that humming-bird has a nest anywhere round here. Did you ever see a humming-bird's nest, grand?"

"Certainly—certainly. But never mind about that now, Christopher."

The General rose from his chair on the porch, and began to walk up and down. Christopher knew from this that he considered the subject of especial importance. He wondered if they were going away from Maybury—perhaps to travel again. He hoped not, just as the Hamiltons had come.

"Christopher," said the General, "I wish you to take my name."

"Your name, grandfather? Baldwin, do you mean?"

"No, that is not necessary. You should have been named Baldwin in the first place, but you were not."

"I was named for my father," said the boy, flushing slightly. "I was Christopher Lovel, Jr., until—until my father died."

"I know that—I know that. No need to tell me that. All that is over and done with. You are not junior now. You are my grandson, however, and, considering the large interests that

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are involved, I think it would be better and more suitable if you were to take the name of Keith."

"But my name is not Keith, it is Lovel."

"It can very easily be changed. By applying to the legislature and going through certain legal proceedings your name can be changed by law from Lovel to Keith. If you chose, you could still keep the Lovel as a middle name; in fact, that might be a good plan. But I want you to bear the name of Keith. You will, in all probability, inherit the greater part of my fortune. It is Keith money. It came from my father. There has always been money in my family. My first ancestor in this country was Sir Baldwin Keith, who came over in 1670. We have been named Baldwin from father to son ever since. My son"—his voice trembled slightly—"was Baldwin. The last of his line—the last of his line." He paced up and down in silence for a few minutes. When he spoke again his voice was as cold and severe as usual.

"Now, then," said he, "I shall take measures at once to have your name changed to Keith."

"But it is not Keith," said Christopher.

"I know it is not!" The old man spoke irascibly now. "I have just explained to you, Christopher, how such a matter is arranged. I intend to have it made Keith."

"But I don't want it to be Keith, grandfather."

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"You don't want it to be! And why not, may I ask? What possible objection can you have, sir, to the name of Keith?"

When the General said "sir" to Chris it meant that he was becoming annoyed.

"I have no objection to it, grandfather. I think it is a very nice name. But it wasn't my father's name."

"But I have explained to you why I wish you to take it. I prefer that the Keith money should go with the name of Keith."

"Isn't there anybody of that name you could give the money to?"

"No, sir, there is not! And I am not contemplating *giving* the money to any one. It is a question of leaving it. I shall not live forever. There is no more proper person to inherit all this"—his glance wandered over the beautiful prospect as he spoke: the lawns, the flower garden, the oddly shaped trees, the woods and fields, all his own, and yet some day he must pass on to something else and be "buried with his fathers," the other Baldwin Keiths, who also had been obliged to leave behind them the great fortune that had been doubling and trebling itself for so many years—"there is no more proper person to inherit all this than my grandson, but he must bear the name of Keith."

"You are very kind, grand," began Christopher.

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"Kind!" shouted the General. "Don't speak of me as being kind. Why shouldn't I be kind? You are my daughter's son. You have as much right to it all as though you had been my son's son."

"But not to the name. You see, there was father. I am father's son. And his name was Christopher Lovel. And—and he spoke to me once about my name."

"He did, did he? And what did he say about the name of Christopher Lovel?"

"He said to take care of it."

"Take care of it? What did he mean by that?"

"To keep it bright and clean. He said that every Christopher Lovel who ever lived had been an honest man, and he wanted me to be one, too. He said he had no money to give me, but he had given me an honest name, and it had never been disgraced. There have been ever so many Christopher Lovels, grandfather, just as there have been Baldwin Keiths, only I don't think the first one in this country was a Sir. I guess he was just plain mister."

"If that!"

"What do you mean, grandfather?"

"Nothing—nothing! But I see nothing in all this to prevent your changing your name."

"Oh, grand! Why, I do! How could I keep the name bright and clean if I gave it up?"

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"Nonsense! Your father would have been willing enough to have you give it up if he had supposed you would be the owner of millions of dollars in consequence."

"No," said Chris; "excuse me, grand, but I don't think so. My father used to tell me that money wasn't everything. He said a kind heart and a forgiving nature were worth more than money. My father had to forgive somebody, I don't know who it was—somebody treated him badly. A good many people did whom father trusted, but this was some particular person who did him a great wrong. I should like to speak to that person just once, but I don't know who it was. Father never would tell me. It was somebody with a great deal of money. Do you know, grand, I think if I ever found out who it was I should just hate that man—for a little while, anyway. I might forgive him later. It seems so awful to me now, now that you have given me so much, that my father should have been so poor, and that any one should have treated him unkindly. I often think of it."

The General paused in his walk and stood behind the boy on the steps. He cleared his throat twice before he could speak. "Did—did your father forgive him, whoever it was?"

"I think he did—yes, I'm sure he did. Who do you suppose it was, grand? I used sometimes

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to think that it might have been you, because, of course, father and mother didn't know that all that time you were trying to find us, and they might have felt pretty badly about it, knowing you were so rich and we were so poor. Of course, now I never think that. I know you would never have been so unkind. I know you so well that I am sure you couldn't ever have been like that. If I didn't know you so well I should feel the same as I used to about it, but I am so sure you tried to find us that I don't feel angry about it any more. I wish they had known it, too. Why did you give us up in the first place, grand? Did my mother do something you didn't like besides marrying father? Of course, I know that was part of it, because Mrs. Toppan told me that when I first came to Maybury. But of course there must have been something else, too."

"Never mind about that now, and we will finish our talk about the name some other time. Where are you going this morning?"

Christopher stood up. This was, indeed, a pleasant surprise. Evidently his grandfather intended to allow him a morning to himself.

"I should like to drive Sassafras over to see the Hamiltons—in the runabout, I mean. I want to show it to Betty. And no matter about Ben going, grandfather."

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"I don't know about you going alone. Why not take Ben?"

"Oh no, grandfather! Please! May I go without him?"

"You may go. Come home to luncheon."

After the boy had gone the old man continued his walk up and down, up and down. He had much to think about.

When Chris reached the Pringle Farm, as the Hamiltons continued to call their place, he found a large party of young people assembled on the piazza. Sassafras was tied in the carriage-house, the runabout duly admired by Betty, and then she informed him that it was a house party. Christopher never having heard of a house party, Betty further explained to him that it consisted of some friends of her brother Maurice and her sister Florence who had come to stay a week.

"And Maurice has come home from college, which makes another fellow," continued Betty. "That is Maurice, the one in the oldest clothes, over there talking to the girl in the hammock. The other fellow, the one who looks so spick and span, is Bromfield Hale. He is Maurice's chum at Harvard. They both got here last night, but the others came day before yesterday. The girl in the hammock is Josephine Hale. She lives at Stockton, near Boston, and she and Florence were at boarding-school together, and are most

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intimate friends. She is Brom Hale's cousin, and she lives with his father. She has a sister Georgiana, about Pauline's age. They have five boy cousins and are the only girls in the house. It must be great fun. I like Jo better than any of Florence's New York friends. She's not so stuck up and airish. The other girl, the one with the dark hair, is Grace Fisher. She is from New York. She is simply crazy about the fellows. She just shows it. I think the boys like Jo Hale the best, though. I am pretty sure Maurice does. The other fellow, the one talking to Florence, is Jack Kendal. He's very sweet on Flo. The boys are all very nice to me," added Betty, complacently. "They all get up and offer me their chairs when I come along, and are very pleasant. They are so afraid I'll play some trick on them."

This long history was poured into Christopher's ears as the children sat on the bench between two trees. From this vantage-point they obtained an excellent view of the group on the piazza. Christopher surveyed the party with much interest.

"It must be nice to have a house party," he observed. "I wish grandfather would have one."

Betty laughed. "It would be a funny kind of a house party," she said. "If it was your grandfather's it would have to be all old men and wom-

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en. Your house parties are always about the same age as yourself, I think. Pauline is going to have one of her friends later, but mother says I have got to wait until next year. It is horrid to be the youngest and always have to wait. Charles is going to have his friends, but only boys. He says they don't want to be bothered with any more girls than there are here already. Charles doesn't care as much about girls as Maurice does. Don't you think my brother Maurice is very good-looking? There, I believe they've made up their minds at last! They've been discussing the whole morning what they would do to-day. What are you going to do?" she called out.

But no one paid any attention to her, and it was only by leaving Christopher and going to the piazza that she could discover the reason for the sudden stir in the group. She beckoned to Chris to follow her, and he came shyly forward.

"They are going out on the lake, some of them, and Maurice and Brom Hale are going to drive down to the village to see if their canoes have come. They are coming up from Boston. Brom Hale is going to be here longer than the others, so he brought his canoe, too. Chris, I've got something for us to do this morning. I'm so glad you came over. Come with me."

Christopher was sorry to leave the piazza, but Betty's word was usually law, and her plans were

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always interesting, so he obeyed her commands and accompanied her around the corner of the house to the kitchen door. They entered, and passed through to a narrow hall, from which a flight of stone steps led down to a cellar.

"Why, Betty, where are you going?" demanded Chris, much surprised to see her descend these stairs.

"Follow me and ask no questions until we are out of hearing. No one knows about this but Charles and me, and he said I could tell you. Do be careful! If the maids didn't happen to be all out of the kitchen they would hear us." They now had reached the cellar. "Isn't this a queer, splendid cellar?" continued Betty. "My father says there are no such cellars made nowadays, and even he doesn't know the wonderful secret there is about this one. Charles and I found it out. You see this old place which looks like an oven door, or a furnace door, built in this stone place? Well, everybody but Charles and me think it is a sort of closet where the people used to keep things to keep them cold, but we found out that it is really an opening leading to an underground passage that leads to the lake. Isn't it too wonderful, and just like some exciting story? We think they had it made to escape from Indians. Now I think it would be the greatest fun to pretend that there are Indians up there

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now. We have fled down here. The house party are the Indians. Of course, we are not to know that they are going to the lake themselves, but we plan to escape to the lake and get away in our old boat. We haven't heard them say that they were going to get their canoes. We think they are doing something else (killing people upstairs), and we *must* escape if we wish to save our lives. Hurry! hurry! Crawl in after me, and all will be well."

No sooner said than done. Betty's tones were so thrilling, her manner so urgent, that it was not difficult to imagine that there were Indians above stairs in war-paint and feathers who were at that moment engaged in wielding their tomahawks and gathering scalps.

"Not one of the maids was there!" continued Betty, still in the same tone of terror. "All are dead or fled. I did not see mamma! And where—oh, where—was my dear little sister Pauline? Dead or fled. My father and brother were out in the barn, and were probably the first victims. They died covered with wounds, fighting to save their family. Oh, hurry! hurry!"

She had crawled through the opening while she was speaking. It was only large enough to allow them to enter on their hands and knees, but once inside the children could stand upright. It was dark and chilly, but the other end was in sight, for

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the tunnel had been made under the hill, which was very steep at this place, and through the bushes which grew beyond the opening there entered rays of daylight and a glimpse of the gleaming water of the lake.

Christopher followed her closely.

"Hark! I hear voices!" exclaimed Betty. "They have come down the hill. We must keep very quiet or they will discover us. We will go close to the opening and listen to their plans. If they don't find out that we are here they may go off in some other direction."

They crouched down just inside the opening and listened. The Indians, in the shape of Josephine Hale, Grace Fisher, Florence Hamilton, and Jack Kendal, were standing within a few feet of the children, but were, of course, quite unconscious of their proximity.

"That boat isn't good for very much," said Florence. Jack Kendal had stepped into it, and with a sponge that was lying in it had begun to bale it out. "Papa intends to get a new one, and he has ordered one; but it hasn't come yet. Charles says that it is all right if it hasn't too heavy a load. There is a leak high up somewhere that he hasn't been able to stop, but with just two in it there is no danger of getting wet. Jack, why don't you take Grace out while we are waiting for the others? I am sure it is just the sort of

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boat you will enjoy, captain of the 'varsity eight! Yale would laugh to see you in that old tub!"

This was a bit cruel, for Harvard had just been beaten at New London, but Florence had reasons of her own for wishing to be severe with Jack. For the same reasons she suggested that he should take Grace out. He could not very well refuse, and then when the other boys arrived with their canoes it would be the most natural thing in the world for Bromfield Hale to invite Florence to go in his. She would have preferred a morning with Jack, even in an old and leaking boat, but she did not intend that he should guess this. He, not very cordially it must be confessed, did as he was bidden. Grace Fisher accepted with alacrity, and although they were a long time getting off, and Jack had many things to say before they did go, he finally pulled off and headed for the middle of the lake, and then rowed around the wooded promontory that jutted out and which finally hid them from sight.

"Now," whispered Betty to Chris, "Flo and Jo are going to talk secrets. Remember that they are Indians left behind to watch for us. If we move, or let them know in any way that we are here, we are all dead men. Be careful!"

"But we may hear their secrets," suggested Chris.

"What if we do? They are Indians planning

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to scalp and massacre us. We have a right to hear their secrets. Sh! Hark! Listen!"

The two Indians, quite ignorant of their dangerous and blood-thirsty characters, seated themselves close to the opening on a flat rock that was shaded from the July sun by a clump of trees.

"We shall probably have to wait ages for the boys," said Florence. "I am glad I told the maids to put up some luncheon for us. We shall not get started until so late that it wouldn't be worth while to go if we had to come back to luncheon. I wonder how Jack is enjoying the boat!"

"Or Grace! Flo, it was too bad you sent him off with her. I have an idea that Jack doesn't like Grace very much."

"Well, she likes him, so I have made her happy."

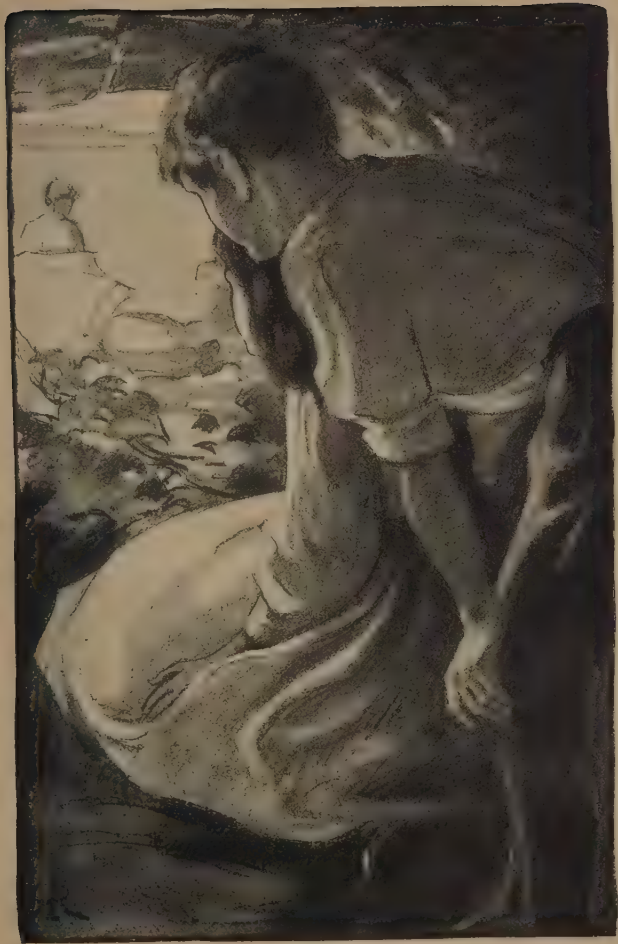
There was silence for a few minutes.

"I wish they would say some more about that," whispered Betty to Chris. "It's the most interesting thing."

"I don't think it's fair for us to listen."

"Why, you goose, we have to! It's part of our game. We are playing a game, and we have made them Indians. If they are silly enough to talk about their own affairs right out-of-doors like that, we have a right to hear what they say."

All this was said in a loud whisper.



“THEY ARE INDIANS PLANNING TO SCALP AND MASSACRE US”

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"What was that?" asked Josephine.

"What?" said Florence. "I didn't hear anything."

Josephine laughed. "No; your thoughts are far away—around the promontory, I suppose. I heard the queerest noise. A kind of a hissing whisper!"

"Oh, Jo, was it a snake?"

"I don't believe so. I don't mind snakes, do you? The boys had one in the house once—had it living up in their closet for days, and no one knew it. No, this sounded like a person whispering."

"The breeze in the trees, perhaps. Pauline has been writing a poem about the whispering trees."

"Pauline is a dear," said Josephine. "She reminds me something of my sister Georgiana, only Georgie is not poetical. Betty is a case, isn't she?"

At this Betty clutched Christopher's arm. "Now they are going to talk about me!" she whispered, very low, lest this time she might not be mistaken for trees or snakes.

"Yes, she certainly is," said Betty's sister. "I wonder where she is now. Up to something, I suppose. She has Chris with her, though, so perhaps he will keep her from doing anything very dreadful."

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"Well, I never!" muttered Betty. "The idea!"

"I certainly heard something then!" exclaimed Josephine. They listened, but there was no sound but the wood noises—birds, insects, fluttering leaves, the fall of a dead branch, and the gentle splashing of the waters of the lake.

"What ears you have, Jo!"

"Or imagination! It seems to be that more than ears, as you hear nothing. What a dear that lame boy is, Florence! Is he the one who was found in a Home, or somewhere, by his grandfather?"

"He was in a Home, but General Keith didn't find him. It was Mr. Toppan, a farmer up here in Maybury. It was only last summer, and Aunt Edith and Betty were up here at the Toppans' and heard all about it. Mrs. Toppan wanted to have a crippled child there to take care of, and Mr. Toppan brought this boy home, and they got so fond of him they wanted to adopt him, and then it was found out that he was really the grandson of General Keith. Just think of General Keith with all that money—millions and millions they say he has—allowing his grandson to be in a Home!"

Christopher made a sudden movement. Betty grasped his arm again. "Be careful!" she breathed in his ear. "*Don't* let them know we are here! They would be simply furious."

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"But I suppose he didn't know it," said Josephine, "though it seems very queer he shouldn't have. How did such a thing happen?"

"Well, you see, General Keith didn't like his daughter's marriage. There was really nothing against Mr. Lovel, my father says, except that he was very poor, was of much plainer family than the Keiths, and was not doing very well in business. The Keiths opposed it violently, which only made the daughter all the more determined to marry him. I should just feel so, shouldn't you, Jo?"

"I don't know," said her friend, slowly. "I am not sure. I think I should think my father or uncle knew better than I did."

"But if you loved him? Wouldn't you think you ought to be true to him?"

"Yes, I should think that; but if they asked me to wait a little while I should think I ought to do that, because if we were very young they would probably know best, and if—if I cared for him I should trust him enough to know we wouldn't change our minds by waiting. Do you suppose General Keith asked them to wait?"

"I don't think so. He was always a violent, determined sort of man, papa says. He was so furious that the daughter walked out of the house and married Mr. Lovel. Afterward her mother begged and begged the General to forgive her,

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but he wouldn't. Mrs. Keith died of a broken heart. Then the daughter died, and then her husband, and they were terribly poor. The General never did anything for them, for they were proud, too, and wouldn't ask, and I don't believe he would have done it if they had asked, for he wouldn't to please his wife. When they were both dead he tried to find the boy, and couldn't. Chris was living then with some horrible man who sent him out into the streets to play his violin. Then he met with the accident that made him lame. Now his grandfather can't do enough for him to make up for it all. They say the General is really a changed man. Oh, here are the boys at last!"

Down the slope came her brother and Bromfield Hale carrying a canoe. The girls' conversation ceased, and before long they were all out on the water. When they were out of sight Betty and Christopher emerged from their hiding-place.

"We're safe," said Betty. "The Indians have gone. Why, Chris, what's the matter? How queer you look! You didn't mind hearing that story about yourself, did you? You knew it already. Why, where are you going?"

"I'm going somewhere—I don't know where."

"Oh, Chris, how mean! Why do you mind so much? I shouldn't if I were you."

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"Shouldn't you? But, you see, you never knew my father."

"But where are you going?"

"Oh, somewhere — I don't know just where. Off for a drive somewhere." He walked to the carriage-house and began to unfasten *Sassafras*. The little horse, weary of waiting, tossed his head and began to back with great agility.

"Why don't you take me for a drive?" asked Betty. "*Sassafras* looks nice and frisky this morning. I'd love to go to drive."

"All right," said Christopher, "jump in."

He was rather glad Betty had suggested it. It would be something to do, something to prevent his return to his grandfather quite yet. He did not wish to see him until he had thought things over. It seemed as though he had lived a lifetime since he left home that morning. Then he was a child. Now he felt the responsibilities of a man without a man's knowledge of how to meet them. He had never heard the story of his parents in just that way. He must decide what to do. He wondered if Betty could help him to decide.

They drove down the hill at a brisk pace, *Sassafras* glad to be moving after his long fight with flies in the Hamiltons' carriage-house. Betty quite forgot to tell any one that she was going to

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drive, and no one saw them start. It was still early in the day, for the clocks were striking eleven when they drove through the village and turned into the road which led to South Maybury.

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FOR some time the children were silent. Betty, in spite of her heedlessness, her impulsive frankness of speech, her occasional disregard for the feelings of others, had a kind little heart. She knew from the look on Christopher's face, when they came out into the open from the underground passage, that the words which he had overheard had made a profound impression upon him, and that impression had not yet passed by. He still wore that strange look upon his face. She glanced up at him as he sat beside her in the runabout. He was on a high seat and he held himself erect, handling the reins with the ease of an experienced driver. He understood horses by instinct, and it pleased his grandfather to believe that he inherited the love of them from him.

"Sassafras is quite a handful, isn't he?" said Betty, at last. "He shies at everything this morning."

There was no answer from Chris.

"I wish we could have some kind of an adventure, don't you?"

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Still there was no answer. Betty began to think the silence had lasted long enough.

"Oh, Chris, do say something! What is the matter, anyhow? I don't see why you are quite so dreadfully cut up. You knew it all before."

"No, I didn't know he hadn't tried to find us. I can't believe it now, Betty. I don't want to believe it."

"Then why do you? Why don't you just say, 'It isn't true,' and not bother about it any more?"

"But suppose it is true? If it is true I want to know it."

"I shouldn't, not if it is so disagreeable. When a true thing isn't pleasant I would rather not know it. What's the use? You can't do anything about it now."

"Yes, I can. Only I don't know just what. And I don't feel that way. I can't believe grandfather was unkind to my father, and I am not going to believe it until I know it was really so; but if it was so I want to know it, because— Oh, Betty, I can't explain exactly, but I mean I would rather know things just as they truly are, and not think they are different from what they are. I didn't use to feel so. Only last summer, you know, I pretended I was Uncle Dan Toppan's real nephew, and made grandfather think I was. Don't you remember?"

"Of course I do."

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"Well, after that I never wanted to be anything that wasn't true again."

"You don't have to be now. You are your grandfather's true grandson."

"I know, but then I—" He paused.

"What were you going to say? I do hate to have people stop just as they are going to say the most interesting thing of all."

"I was just going to say that I'm father's son, too, and if grandfather wasn't kind to father— Oh, I don't know! I'm all mixed up about it. What would you do, Betty?"

"I wouldn't do anything, I tell you! I'd just let things go. Chris, are you really going all the way to South Maybury?"

"Do you want to? We may as well. Sassafras is going along so fast it won't take us long."

"Oh, do let's go! It will be fun when we get there. I love to go to South Maybury and drive up to the shops, and go skipping on and off the car tracks. Do you suppose Sassafras will mind the trolley-cars? Here comes an automobile. Oh, Chris!"

She found it necessary to grasp the side of the carriage and hold on tight. Sassafras was certainly in a gay mood that morning. Further conversation was impossible for some time, but at last Christopher had brought him down to a trot; and as there was nothing more to disturb him

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at present on the country road, he went quietly enough, although he insisted upon passing every vehicle that he saw ahead of him.

"This is the first time Sassafras has ever gone to South Maybury," said Chris, "and it's the first time I have ever driven him without grandfather or Ben."

They were approaching the town now. The houses along the road were closer together; there were one or two persons walking. Presently they reached a corner where the car tracks turned into the road they were on, and it became the main street of the little town. Vehicles were more numerous now, and here and there was a shop. In a few minutes they were driving over a paved street.

"What are we going to do now we are here?" asked Christopher.

Betty did not reply at once. She was gazing intently at the people on the street. There were many more than she had ever before seen together in South Maybury. They were all moving in one direction.

"There is something going on," said she. "Chris! It is! It is! See! Look at the crowds waiting on that corner! It is coming along there!"

"What is coming? What do you mean, Betty?"

"Oh, you stupid! Don't you know? Why,

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the circus, of course. I had forgotten all about it. Charles is crazy to come. You know, the signs have been all over everywhere, but I thought it was coming next week. We'll see the procession! Oh, won't Charles be wild when he hears we've been here! Let's go to it, Chris! Have you got any money? I haven't got a cent. How much do you suppose it is? I do hope you have some, for it would be perfectly maddening to be right here at the very doors of the circus and not see it."

Christopher investigated his pockets, transferring the reins from one hand to another in order to do so. He had just discovered fifty cents in one pocket, and was in the act of drawing up a quarter of a dollar from the depths of another, when Sassafras took the opportunity to stand on his hind legs. He objected to the close proximity of a hurdy-gurdy which was grinding out the strains of a gay march right under his nose. Of course, any horse of proper spirit would stand on his hind legs. For a few minutes circus money was forgotten, while Sassafras's young master devoted himself to placing the horse on four legs again.

"We shall have to put him somewhere," said Chris. "He would cut up dreadfully if we had him here when the procession comes along. Let's take him to a stable. There is one in the next

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street where they know grandfather. I have been there with him, so I could have it charged, and save all the money for the circus."

This seemed an excellent plan, so they turned the corner and drove to the stable. It did not take long to arrange for the care of Sassafras; and in a few minutes the children, on foot, had joined the crowd in the street, which, with one accord, was moving toward Market Street, along which the procession was to come. Christopher had collected his possessions, and found that they amounted to the proud sum of one dollar and thirty-nine cents: quite enough for both to enter the gates at twenty-five cents each, and to admit them to several side-shows and buy a sufficient amount of pop-corn, peanuts, and, perhaps, lemonade. Troubles and family differences, cares and home duties—all were forgotten. Who could possibly remember that there is any one else in the world besides one's self and one's boon companion when a circus is in progress? Certainly neither Christopher nor Betty. And with eager faces and light hearts they stood upon the high steps of the town hall, which fronted on Market Street, and from this point of vantage watched that most fascinating of sights to him or her whose heart has not grown old—the circus parade.

It was only a little circus, comparatively speaking. There was a mere handful of elephants (if

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elephants may be counted by handfuls), half a dozen cages with small "wild beasts," some lovely ladies on weary horses which had served their term as teamsters, no doubt, and were rounding out an industrious existence clothed in gay trappings and bearing the sylph-like forms of the "Queen of Beauty" and the "Lady Geraldine." There was a snake-charmer and a lion-tamer, each with his chosen pet, and best of all, in the eyes of the admiring public, there was the clown in red-and-white stripes and a face of chalk. Betty clutched Chris when the clown came in sight.

"Charles would give his eyes to be here!" she whispered. "He adores clowns."

It was the only thought that either of them gave to the families at home. When the last object of their admiration had been trundled by—it was the fat lady, drawn by six white horses—they hurried down the steps and followed the procession. It was not far to the grounds, where great white tents had received the parading treasures; and Christopher having produced his half-dollar, the two were admitted to the sacred precincts. And from that moment time was forgotten, for there is no time to think of time when one is absolutely and entirely happy. And how can one avoid being absolutely and entirely happy when the smell of the sawdust has penetrated

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the nostrils, the sound of music is falling upon the ears, the taste of peanuts is upon the tongue, the sight of the funniest, the most versatile clown who ever turned a somersault is rejoicing the eyes, and one is accompanied by the most congenial of companions who echoes one's dearest wish almost before it has been expressed?

The "Fat Lady" had been called upon, the moving pictures representing "A Lost Child" had been watched with breathless attention, the "Thin Gentleman Whose Only Food is Tacks" had been closely scanned with audible doubts as to the genuineness of his nourishment, the "Traveller from the Antipodes with His Linguistic Chimpanzee" had been questioned as to his travels, and the children had paused to count their money in order to find out how many more pleasures were still at their command, when Betty, watching the crowd while Chris did the counting, gave a sudden and delighted exclamation.

"Why, Chris," she cried, in a high, piercing voice, "if there isn't somebody we know! It is George Smith! How did he ever get here? Hollo, George!" She raised her voice still higher, for George was separated from them by a number of persons and appeared to be slightly deaf. Betty had no idea, however, of allowing him to escape; in fact, it did not occur either to her or to Chris that he was not eager to be

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recognized. They elbowed their way through the crowd, and reached his side just as he was about to enter the tent of "Fascinating Fernando Who Refuses to be Fastened."

"Hollo, George!" they both exclaimed together, and there was nothing for George to do but return their friendly greeting.

"When did you come?" asked Chris. "Are you staying at Maybury?"

"I'm going over there soon," said George. "You needn't let on you seen me. I'm here looking for a job."

"Have you given up being a railroad man?" asked Chris.

"Well, I'm thinking of giving it up. It don't pay very well. I was only on for a time, anyhow. I was doin' it for another feller, and he's back. He was sick at the hospital—got his foot hurt fallin' off a train. When he got well he come back and took his job again. I'm goin' home for a little while, but I just stopped over here to see the circus. I say, have you seen all the shows? It's an awful smart feller in here, they say. He can untie any knot you put on to him, and handcuffs and chains and everything. He slips right out of 'em as slick as anything. He's a regular Houdini. Come along in!"

So the three entered the tent of the "Fascinating Fernando."

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There was no doubt about his fascination. His charm was increased by the fact that the bystanders could help to tie him up; indeed, their efforts were part of the performance. Each one lent a hand and gave an extra twist to the rope which was used to bind him, and both Chris and Betty assisted in the process. So wonderful were his antics, his writhings, his suppleness, that for a time they forgot to look at his face. When Betty did glance at it she looked again. He had very long and thick flaxen hair, which to the more sophisticated would have suggested a wig. His color was so high and so steady that there was no doubt in Betty's mind of its being supplied artificially, and he wore a magnificent blond mustache which neatly matched his hair. She had never seen such hair before, but his eyes and his ears were strangely familiar to her. Where had she met, or tried to meet, those restless, shifty eyes, and where had she seen those enormous ears which stuck out so far from the head? She stood staring at him, forgetting to watch his actions, and with so steady a gaze that she attracted his glance in return. In an instant the "Fascinating Fernando" wheeled about and presented a new variety of performance. In a high falsetto voice he requested the audience to tie his hands behind him and to fasten one foot to his hands. This was done by George Smith, who had proved to be

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particularly clever at the work of tying. The "Fascinating Fernando" wriggled out of the knots, and then with a low bow disappeared behind a curtain.

"Oh, it's over!" sighed Chris. "I liked it about as well as anything. I suppose it's dinner-time and he's gone behind there to get some. I'm awfully hungry, aren't you, Betty? I forgot all about dinner. I suppose we ought to be going back to Maybury Centre."

They were standing close to the curtain behind which the "Fascinator" had vanished.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Betty. "Well, I suppose we ought. General Keith won't like it if you are very late, Chris. Are you going over there to-day, George?"

"Not to-day. I'm lookin' for a job here. And mind you, don't let on you seen me."

They moved slowly away. They did not look back, and so they were not aware of being watched. The "Fascinating Fernando" came out from behind his curtain, at first cautiously, and then with more boldness. He saw the parting at his tent door. George Smith walked away in one direction, Chris and Betty moved quickly toward an exit gate. The "Fascinator" followed Smith. He overtook him as he reached another side-show and engaged him in conversation, presently inviting him to see the show at his, the

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"Fascinator's," expense. It was a pleasant surprise to George to receive such an invitation, and he did not hesitate an instant in accepting it.

Betty and Chris, with slow and lingering footsteps, moved away from the great white tents which covered so much that was wonderful. They walked to the stable, and presently they were driving homeward at a brisk pace, very hungry, very tired, and with time now to wonder how their absence would be regarded by the authorities. When they drove up the steep ascent of Pringle Farm they found General Keith awaiting them upon the piazza. He assisted Betty to alight with the utmost politeness. He bade Mrs. Hamilton good-bye in the same stately manner, and stepped into the runabout. Christopher drove away without a word, but he glanced at Betty. Mrs. Hamilton had taken her hand and was leading her into the house. She looked very solemn, and so did Betty. It was some time before General Keith spoke. When he did it was with a constrained voice.

"I did not expect to see you alive," said he. "Will you kindly give an account of yourself? As I expected, Miss Betty was with you. I find it difficult to forgive her."

"It wasn't Betty's fault. I asked her to go. There was no harm in our going. I'm twelve years old."

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The General turned and looked at him. In his astonishment he forgot to be angry. At last he found his voice.

"You may be twelve years old, but you are still my grandson. I expect you to go nowhere without my permission. Where have you been?"

"To the circus." There was a moment's silence. The joys of the morning had not yet lost their charm. The troubles of the morning had not yet reasserted themselves. "It was splendid! Oh, grand, don't you love the circus? Even if you don't now, didn't you when you were only twelve?"

"I think perhaps I did. I—I hardly remember. Tell me all about it, Christopher."

And he forgot for the time his displeasure, and Christopher his cares. It was not until they were at home again, and the delayed luncheon had been eaten and Christopher was alone, while his grandfather took his afternoon nap, that he began again to think over all that he had heard that morning when he and Betty were hidden in the underground passage.

XI

ONE afternoon a few days later than that upon which Betty and Christopher played Indians and went to the circus, Rachel Amy Martin walked up to Pringle Farm. Her mother had sent her upon an errand which was to her of the greatest importance, and Rachel Amy had received careful directions as to the manner of doing it.

"Ring the door-bell no matter who you see outside, and give the envelope to the person who opens the door," said Mrs. Martin. "Don't you think you can get out of it by givin' it to any of the young folks. They'll only lose it before Mrs. Hamilton hears a word about it. If I give a four-o'clock I want that the *invites* should get to the right folks. Some I'll send by mail, like the one to Mrs. Davis over to West Newbury, and some others like that. The Toppans have got to be asked, I suppose, though I hate to do it real bad, seein' they're so thick with that Miss Lucetta Smith; but the Toppans have got a kind o' position here, and I don't feel as though I'd better

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leave 'em out. I'll send the *invite* to them by Mr. Tarleton. You can leave these others on your way to Pringle Farm, Rachel Amy, and mind you do it right and don't be makin' any mistakes."

So Rachel Amy departed with a number of notes which by the time she reached Pringle Farm had all been disposed of at various houses along the way, with the exception of the one addressed in her mother's stiff, cramped handwriting to "Mrs. Hamilton and family." It contained a card upon which was her mother's name, "Mrs. Eliza Martin," done in South Maybury by a professional, with heavy shadings on the downward slope of the letters in true Spencerian style. At the lower left-hand corner was written, "Four-o'clock," in quotation marks, and beneath that the date, and "R. S. V. P." These cards of invitation had cost Mrs. Martin much time and thought, and were the result of detailed consultation with the man in South Maybury who wrote what he designated as "calling cards," and of prolonged study of the columns of certain magazines which impart advice about social affairs.

Obedying her mother's instructions, Rachel Amy marched straight to the front door, although Pauline and Betty were near at hand under the trees, and Florence and her friends were on the piazza. She rang the bell, apparently unconscious of the fact that Pauline was approaching.

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"Hollo, Rachel," said Pauline, who, having discovered that it was a trial to Rachel Amy to bear two names, had immediately begun to call her by but one, "I'm glad to see you. Have you a note for mamma?"

"Yes," said the girl. "No, don't take it, Pauline. I've got to give it to the hired help. Mother said on no account to give it to any of you girls. It's an invitation to a four-o'clock, and I've got to be very particular."

"I'm afraid you will wait there until night, then," said Pauline, laughing good-naturedly. "The maids have all been allowed to go off on a picnic, and they won't get home till supper-time. Unless you insist upon mamma's coming down to take it herself, I'm afraid you'll have to give it to me. I will take it right up to her so you will know it is all safe."

"Perhaps she could give me an answer to take back, and then mother 'd be satisfied," said Rachel Amy. "Mother says she knows it isn't customary to put R. S. V. P. on four-o'clock cards—that means 'answer if you please'—though I can't see why, for the letters don't stand for those words; but she's got to know how many is coming on account of the maple syrup. There, I wasn't to mention maple syrup, so please don't say anything about it, Pauline."

"No, I won't. Just go sit down under the

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trees with Betty, and I'll come back again as soon as I can."

But Betty had disappeared, so Rachel Amy waited there alone until Pauline returned. She could not help looking shyly now and then at the girls and young men on the porch. They seemed to be having such a good time, to judge by the amount of laughing and talking that they were doing. Everything that was said appeared to be of the most amusing nature. Rachel Amy's life thus far had not known much laughter. She was of a serious temperament, but she was young. She would have liked "a good time," too. But how could a girl have that who lived in a house that was literally as well as metaphorically "divided against itself"? She did not put this question into precisely those words as she sat watching the others, half in interest, half in envy, but she thought of her mother's peculiar disposition, and of her dear aunt Lucetta on the other side of the wire netting. She would have been glad, too, to be friends with her cousins the Smiths. They might all have been young together. Rachel Amy longed for somebody in the house who was young. But now she had a friend of her own age in Pauline. Chris was her friend, too, to be sure, but he was younger and only a boy. She turned and smiled happily at Pauline as she came to her over the grass.

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"Here is the answer," Pauline called out. "Mamma and two of us will be very glad to come."

"Only two of you? Dear me, I'm afraid mother won't like it unless you all come."

"Why, it would make a great many! Papa and my brothers are so busy doing things when they are up here that mamma thought it better to decline for them. Papa is not here now, and he may not be back in time for it, and Florence is going away to make some visits, so there would not be anybody but Betty and me to go with mamma, anyway."

"All right, I'll tell mother that, and then she'll feel better satisfied. Pauline, I just love that book you lent me. It's splendid. I haven't quite finished it, so I couldn't bring it back to-day."

"Oh, there's no hurry about bringing it back. How far have you gone?"

They fell into an animated discussion of the book and of other things of equal interest to them both. The afternoon passed rapidly away. The shadows lengthened on the grass. The young people left the piazza and went off for a drive, the boys harnessing the horses themselves, as the stable-men had gone to the picnic. Betty had vanished on some private enterprise of her own, and no one interrupted the two girls under the trees.

It was nearly six o'clock when a little girl came

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hurriedly up the hill. She had evidently been running, for her face was flushed and she breathed quickly. She came straight to the bench where Pauline and Rachel Amy were sitting. Betty and Brownie came out of the house as she approached, and reached the bench at the same time that she did. "Hollo, Lucy!" said Betty. "Come along with me. We'll go out to the barn."

It was Lucy Smith, and Betty thought this a most tactful way of separating the two cousins, who were not allowed to be on speaking terms.

Lucy scarcely heeded her. She had lost her quiet little manner, her demure way of walking and speaking. She called out, excitedly, to her cousin:

"Rachel Amy, you'd better come right home! Aunt Lucetta sent me to tell you. Your mother's sick—at least she was groaning, and we thought she was sick."

Rachel Amy started to her feet. "Has Aunt Lucetta gone in there?"

"Yes, she went in, and your mother was real nice to her—I guess she thought maybe she was going to die. Aunt Lucetta says she's better now, but she thought you ought to come home. We knew you was here with the invitations for the four-o'clock. We heard your mother telling you."

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"I oughtn't to have stayed so long!" exclaimed her cousin. "Oh, if mother has only made up with Aunt Lucetta!" And she ran down the hill without stopping to say good-bye.

"Do you think she really has?" asked Betty.

"I don't know," replied Lucy, calmly. "We think she's going to get married, and she wants to leave Rachel Amy with us. She told Aunt Lucetta to-day she might buy her half of the house. She'd like to sell her share to Aunt Lucetta, and she said something about leaving Rachel Amy here if she went to live somewhere else. And we heard Mr. Tarleton talking in there, and saying he was going into business over to Kingford. We hear most everything through the wire netting. To-day we heard her groaning. We thought it was just her way, but the groans got so awful that Aunt Lucetta got scared. She just couldn't stand it, she was so afraid Mrs. Martin might be real sick, after all, this time. You know Mrs. Martin is my aunt Lucetta's sister, so of course she feels worried when she thinks she's real sick."

"I shouldn't be," said Betty. "I should just hate her, and be glad to hear her groaning."

"Why, Betty!" remonstrated Pauline. "She's her own sister!"

"I don't care if she is. She's a hateful person, and deserves to groan. If you behaved like that,

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Paul, I should hate you." Then suddenly Betty began to laugh.

"Betty, how can you laugh like that?" asked Pauline, gravely. She would not for the world hurt Lucy's feelings, and the conversation had become very personal.

"I can't help it. Only think how funny it would be," said Betty, as soon as she could speak, "for you and me to live with a wire netting between us! Suppose we had one in our house, and half the family lived on one side and half on the other! We're an uneven number of children, so one of us would have to take turns. I speak to be the one. It would give me such a nice change of relations."

"Betty, you're too bad!" said Pauline, trying not to laugh on Lucy's account. But Lucy was not offended.

"I don't mind," said she. "It's all Mrs. Martin's doings, and we think she's crazy—Aunt Lucetta and I do. Aunt Lucetta minds it, and wishes she could be friends again and all live together, but I don't. Mrs. Martin wasn't nice to us and neither was Rachel Amy. I'm glad there is a wire netting."

"I should think you would be. Don't you think Rachel Amy is rather stuck-up?" It was Betty who asked this question.

"I don't think she is," said Pauline, "and I've

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gotten to know her quite well. Maybe she used to be, but I think now she's different."

"She's always been very stuck-up with me," said Lucy.

"There!" exclaimed Betty.

"Well, you see if I am not right," said Pauline. "I think she has been with you, Lucy, because her mother makes her, and with Betty because Betty has never liked her, and people always know when other people don't like them; but I think Rachel Amy down underneath isn't one bit proud or stuck-up, and you will both find it out some day and like her."

"Oh, that's just like you, Paul," said her sister. "You always take the side of the down-trodden, and stand up for unpopular people. It's just the way it always is in school, Lucy. If Pauline thinks a girl is neglected or isn't liked, and the other girls don't notice her enough, Paul always goes and gets intimate with her and helps her out of her troubles."

"I should think everybody would love Pauline," said Lucy.

"They do!" cried Betty, throwing her arms around her sister's neck and kissing her. "She's a darling, dear."

"Betty, you goose!" said Pauline. "You exaggerate awfully. Don't believe her, Lucy."

"I do believe her," said Lucy, standing directly

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in front of the sisters. "I almost wish you were my friend instead of Rachel Amy's, but that's a mean wish, because I have Aunt Lucetta and my brother George, but Rachel Amy only has her mother."

"I can be friends with you both," said Pauline.

"No, you couldn't be that. You see, we are not allowed to share things. Even though we own the same aunt we're not allowed to share her. Of course, we couldn't have the same friend."

"I think it is perfectly outrageous!" exclaimed Betty. "That horrid wire netting comes poking in between you and everything; but I'm glad you've got that nice Miss Lucetta on your side of it, Lucy."

The house with the wire netting was not the only house in Maybury Centre where trouble was to be found. At Keith Hall the master was unhappy, in spite of all the luxury and beauty with which he was surrounded, and in spite, too, of the fact that he had with him the grandson whom he loved so devotedly. It was owing to this grandson that General Keith was anxious. He did not know what had come over the boy during these last few days. Christopher had suddenly become moody and silent. The childish face had grown older. The look of sunny happiness had left it. The boy seemed careworn. He did not respond in any way to his grandfather, nor did

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he make any affectionate demonstration to the old man, as it was his real nature to do. He would sit silently brooding over something for an hour at a time. What it was the General could not imagine. He decided, therefore, that the boy was ill, and he anxiously requested the housekeeper to feel his pulse, and he watched his appetite with a close attention that was pathetic.

"I believe I will send for the doctor," said he, suddenly, at dinner one night. "You are not eating anything, Christopher, and you have always liked broiled chicken. This is your favorite kind of ice-cream, too. You are ill. Have you ever had measles?—or chicken-pox? And what are the other things children have? You are going to have one of them, I have no doubt. We will try and get the doctor here to-night. There is a very good man at West Maybury."

"I'm not sick. I don't need the doctor," said Christopher.

"Then what is it?" asked the General, getting up from the table and walking to and fro. "Something is the matter. Can you look me in the face and say nothing is the matter?" He paused by Christopher's chair, and placing his hand under the boy's chin, he turned up the face and scanned it eagerly, tenderly, with a long, searching look.

Christopher gazed back at him, the boy's blue eyes staring unflinchingly into those of the man.

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The General's eyes had once been dark and bright and keen as an eagle's. They were keen now, but they were faded. He was growing old.

"What is the matter, boy? Can't you tell me."

"No, grandfather, I don't believe I can."

"There is something on your mind, isn't there? You are worried about something."

"Yes, grandfather."

"Well, what is it?" He was walking up and down again now. "Can't you tell me? Is it money? Do you want some more money?"

"Oh no!"

"Is it—is it the matter we were speaking of the other day? I mean the name. Can it be that you are troubled about that?"

"Oh no, grandfather. That doesn't trouble me. Of course I am not going to change my name."

"Oh, you're not, eh? Decided the matter for yourself, have you? And since when were you your own master? I tell you, sir, if I say you are to change it, you shall change it! You are a minor, and I am your legal guardian. I can make you change it!" The General had unmistakably lost his temper.

Christopher said nothing. In a moment General Keith paused again in his walk. He stood by the table and rested his hands on it while he leaned over and looked at the boy.

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"I dislike very much to go into these details, Christopher, or to point out to any one the benefits I have conferred; most of all do I dislike to enter into such details with my grandson. But you seem to have forgotten the respect that is due me. Do you realize, sir, that you would be penniless except for me?—that you were a homeless orphan?—a—a—" He was about to say a cripple, but he stopped in time. The boy's lameness was one of his grandfather's heaviest trials. "To be sure, the Toppans were ready to adopt you, but what would that have been compared to the home and the care that I have given you?"

"I know all that, grandfather," said Christopher, speaking at last, "but I can't help it. I am very much obliged to you, but I can't change my name. Father wouldn't like it."

"Then don't change it!" shouted General Keith. "And go to your room at once, sir. I don't wish to see you again to-night."

Christopher obeyed him. The General watched him as he left the dining-room. His limp was scarcely perceptible, but it was there. The boy paused a moment in the hall and looked back, and as he did so, by a sudden impulse, the old man opened wide his arms. In a moment the boy was in them.

"What is it, child?" asked the grandfather.

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"What is troubling you? Can't you tell your old grand?"

"I can't. You wouldn't like it," whispered Chris, who was crying—"you wouldn't like it." And he would say nothing more.

After awhile he went to bed, and General Keith, sitting by his library table, pretended to read. What could have happened to the boy? He thought of going to consult somebody, but his pride forbade it. Mrs. Toppan might help him, or Mrs. Hamilton. On the whole, Mrs. Hamilton would be the better person, for Mrs. Toppan must not know that Christopher was not happy. She had wished to adopt him for her own. It would not do to let her be aware of the fact that life with his grandfather was not a complete success. Indeed, it would be quite out of the question to impart such a secret to any one. No; the General had never been in the habit of consulting others about his affairs; he would not begin now. Probably it was just some fancy of Christopher's which he would get over. All children had fancies of some kind, presumably. This matter of the name, now. It was an idea of the boy's that he could not give up his father's name. No doubt he had an exaggerated sense of the duty that he thought he owed to the memory of his dead father. It would be best to let matters rest awhile—to say nothing, and to fill his mind

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with other things; in short, to direct his attention from all serious affairs, and then, later, to bring up the subject again. For the General had no intention of yielding; he had never yielded. Why should he begin now? Of course, his grandson should be made to do as he thought best, and of course it was best that the Keith name should inherit the Keith money. But all in good time—all in good time.

And having decided thus, he tiptoed up to see if Christopher was awake, and finding that he was, he kissed him and told him not to worry about things. And Christopher, who had also been thinking things over, and who loved the old man as truly as he himself was loved, patted his hand and promised not to worry. He honestly tried to forget the story he had overheard, and which had been the cause of his changed attitude toward his grandfather, but that was a most difficult task. He had brooded over it so much that by this time it had attained overwhelming proportions. It seemed to him that his grandfather must be a very cruel man, and yet he could not reconcile this view of him with the one which he already knew. It was all very puzzling. But he wanted to love him, and now that the General had come to him so tenderly, he could not believe him to be cruel. No, there was some mistake somewhere. And still holding his grandfather's

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hand while the old man sat beside his bed, the boy fell asleep.

It was a long, long time before the General moved. It seemed so wonderful a thing to hold the relaxed, childish fingers within his own.

"And he is mine!" thought he. "My own grandson—my daughter's son—my boy!"

XII

THE afternoon appointed for Mrs. Martin's four-o'clock proved to be one of the hottest of the season. For many days the sun had been shining from a cloudless sky, and the earth was so baked with its rays that even at night there was but little relief. There had been no rain for weeks, and the farmers were growing anxious; every morning and every evening they searched the horizon and peered at the direction of the wind, hoping for signs of change, after the manner of those whose livelihood depends upon so uncertain a factor as the weather. Mrs. Martin had been saying for a week that it would be "just her luck to have the drought break up the day she most wished to have pleasant; she never did want rain but what it was clear, nor want it clear but what it rained." But this time her gloomy predictions did not come true, and she, not the farmers, was destined to be gratified.

Since early dawn she and her daughter had been busy, and when at half-past three they seated themselves in the best parlor, to await with what

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patience they could muster the arrival of their guests at four o'clock, they were so tired that Mrs. Martin did not hesitate to declare that she would never give a four-o'clock again as long as she lived. Rachel Amy's new dress, made for the occasion in South Maybury, was thick and scratchy, and so tight in the collar that she felt as though she were being strangled, and her new shoes gave forth so alarming a creak that it embarrassed her to take a step. The creaking shoes not only seemed to make the day hotter, but they hurt. Mrs. Martin, in a thick green silk which accentuated the sallowness of her complexion, felt that the consciousness of being well dressed atoned somewhat for the arduous preparations.

"I'm glad I got green, for it's altogether worn," she said to her daughter, as she rocked to and fro and fanned herself. "I noticed Florence Hamilton had on a green last Sabbath in church. Hers was only a muslin, and couldn't have cost more'n a quarter of a dollar a yard, if that. It does beat all the cheap clothes those rich folks wear. I suppose they think anything is good enough for up here in the country, and that's the very reason I bought me and I bought you a new dress, Rachel Amy. I set my heart on provin' to 'em that I know what's what. My, ain't it hot! Are you sure you set all the saucers right, and that the maple syrup's on, Rachel Amy? There,

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I never once thought of havin' the melodeon standin' open, with a piece of music on it, so as to look as if one of us played regular. You fix it now, Rachel Amy."

Her daughter creaked over to the melodeon, arranged it as she was directed, and creaked back again to her place.

"I do hope they'll all come punctual," continued Mrs. Martin. "If there's anything I can't abide it's havin' to wait. What time is it now, Rachel Amy?"

Rachel Amy creaked into the next room and reported the hour as twenty minutes of four.

"Twenty minutes yet! Dear me, those shoes of yours make an awful sight of noise! If there's anything I do hate it's hearin' creakin' shoes on a hot day, or any day, as to that. It seems as if it was just my luck that you happened on such shoes, child. It gives me a headache to have you move. You'll have to keep as quiet as you can. It's real unfortunate for me, though, with no one else to depend upon. It does seem to me as if there was no one had things go wrong the way I do. And such a hot day as this is, and I one who feels the heat so! I don't believe there's a person who feels heat as much as I do, and yet I'm so thin. If I was fleshy there'd be some reason for it. It just wilts me right down. You're pretty lucky, Rachel Amy, that you don't take

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after me in feelin' the heat. Go tell your aunt Lucetta and Lucy to come in now. Won't it be a surprise to all the folks to find the wire netting's down, and that we're friends again! I always was of a most forgivin' nature."

Rachel Amy did as she was bidden, and presently Miss Lucetta and Lucy were established in Mrs. Martin's parlor. Intercourse between the two branches of the family was still somewhat strained, but the netting had been taken away and business arrangements had been talked over. Miss Lucetta and Rachel Amy felt very happy about it, but to George and Lucy it was a different matter. They had no reason for loving their aunt Eliza. George had arrived at Maybury Centre that morning, but upon finding the netting gone he had left the house again and had passed the greater part of the day in the woods.

"You look as cool as anything, Lucetta. It's real aggravatin' to see you, and me feelin' the heat so much," said Mrs. Martin.

But before her sister had time to reply to this amiable greeting the first guest was seen coming up the path. It was Mrs. Davis, of West Maybury, a very great lady indeed, and her presence at the feast, as well as her punctual arrival, caused Mrs. Martin to forget, for a time at least, the perversity of human affairs. Most of the guests were prompt, and by twenty minutes past

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four they were all there with the exception of the Hamiltons. The news of the reconciliation had already spread, and Miss Lucetta was greeted with marked cordiality. Mrs. Martin cast many an anxious glance toward the front door as she stood by the mantel-piece and conversed with her friends. She intended that they should be seated later, but until all had assembled they should remain standing. Where were the Hamiltons? It would be just her luck if something had happened to prevent them from coming, but in that case they certainly should have sent word. It was difficult to talk with this possibility in her mind, but at last a stir in the room and the turning of several heads toward the windows gave indication of an arrival of some sort, and presently Mrs. Hamilton came in accompanied by her three daughters.

"I'm real pleased you've come at last," said Mrs. Martin, shaking hands with each in turn, and then introducing them to the other guests. "I didn't know as you'd ever get here."

"We were delayed just as we were starting," said Mrs. Hamilton. "Something was wrong with the harness. You see, I have my eldest daughter with me after all, Mrs. Martin. She is not going away until to-morrow, so I took the liberty of bringing her."

"Well, I'm pleased to see her," said Mrs. Mar-

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tin, "as long as we're not sittin' at table with regular set places. I did invite a lady to take her place when I heard she couldn't come, but I presume it won't be too crowded. Now, if you'll all be seated—" She pointed to the sofa and chairs which had been arranged with their backs to the four walls of the room. All sat down, and for a moment there was profound silence. It was broken by Betty.

"Are we going to play games?" she asked. Her voice was loud and clear. She was intensely interested in the proceedings.

"No, we're not," replied her hostess.

"Oh!" said Betty, with unmistakable disappointment. "Then what are we going to do?"

Florence, who was sitting next to her, touched her foot gently with her own. "Do hush, Betty!" she whispered.

Betty was about to respond in some way to this when her attention was arrested by Mrs. Martin's next remark. Evidently these "city folks" were in the habit of receiving entertainment of some kind, and they should find that Maybury Centre was not behind New York city.

"We are to have some music," said Mrs. Martin. "Mrs. Davis, I presume you play. Will you be so kind as to give us a tune on the melodeon?"

"Why, Lizy Martin!" cried Mrs. Davis, who

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looked the personification of plumpness and prosperity, "I haven't touched a piano, let alone a melodeon, since I was married. I sh'd forget to keep my feet goin' sure as anything. Get some of the young folks to play us something. There's your Rachel Amy. I presume she can play."

But Rachel Amy, in an agony of shyness, vanished into the next room, and the sound of her shoes was heard in a *diminuendo* as she hastened to the remotest corner of her mother's share of the house.

"There!" said Mrs. Martin. "To think of all the money I've spent on her musical education, and now she won't put her finger to the keys! Don't any of your girls play, Mrs. Hamilton?"

"Florence does," piped out Betty, who had not quite forgiven her sister for her signal of silence.

"Yes, Florence plays," said Mrs. Hamilton; "though I don't know whether you have ever played on a melodeon, have you, dear?"

"Never," said Florence. "I'm sure I never could."

"I could," said Betty. "I've tried it. Would you like me to play 'Home, Sweet Home, with Variations'?"

Without waiting to be urged, she went to the little organ and played her "piece." As she occasionally forgot to keep her feet in action, being so fully occupied with her hands, the music

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was somewhat halting and gasping in its effect, but no one seemed to mind.

"Isn't it hot!" exclaimed Mrs. Davis, when she had finished thanking her.

"Would you like fans?" asked Mrs. Martin.

"Rachel Amy, hand round the fans."

Rachel Amy, who had appeared when Betty began to play, procured a pile of palm-leaf fans and distributed them as far as they would go.

"My, but your shoes creak!" said Betty, quite audibly, from the music-stool. Rachel Amy's face became more deeply flushed than before, but she did not speak.

"Come, sit down by me, child," said Mrs. Toppan, making room for her on the sofa; "you look real tired, Rachel Amy. I guess you've been working hard getting ready; and it's such a hot day."

"Well, if anybody's felt the heat I guess it's me," said Mrs. Martin. "It's not worth while for you to be sittin' down now, Rachel Amy. It's time we had the refreshments. If you'll excuse me a minute, ladies—" She left the room, followed by her daughter, and the visitors fanned and rocked and talked while she was gone, and Betty, in response to a request from Mrs. Davis, again played "Home, Sweet Home."

"I did it better that time," said she. "I only forgot my feet once. Would you like to hear

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'Monastery Bells'?" But before she had played more than the opening bars of that classic she was interrupted by the return of their hostess, who came in bearing a large tray, and followed by Rachel Amy carrying a smaller one. These trays were placed upon the centre-table, from the top of which Mrs. Toppan hurriedly removed the piles of books and the ornamental lamp at the request of Mrs. Martin, who had not done this before the company came, for the obvious reason that she wished her new lamp to be seen and admired.

"There!" exclaimed Mrs. Martin. "I d' know as it's etiquettical, but I thought it would be real acceptable and something new at a four-o'clock to have maple syrup instead of tea. It's more substantial, anyway. Rachel Amy, you hand round the saucers. Ain't her shoes awful, though? Suppose you try goin' on your tip-toes, Rachel Amy, and then you won't make such a noise. I hope it ain't givin' any of you a headache like it has me. You're lucky if it hasn't. I don't believe anybody ever had such headaches as I have. It does seem sometimes as though I was especially picked out by the Lord to suffer."

While she talked she handed the plates, upon each of which was a glass saucer containing the maple syrup, to her daughter, who in turn distributed them among the guests.

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"It's real hot; be careful you don't burn your mouth," whispered Rachel Amy to each person.

The guests stirred and hesitated. No one felt like burning her mouth on a hot day. There was no doubt about the heat in the syrup, for steam was certainly to be seen rising from each saucer. One or two tried the effect of blowing upon the spoonful. No one spoke for a long time. At last Betty laid down her spoon.

"Goody, but it's sweet!" she exclaimed. "I don't believe I can eat another drop. It makes me feel—"

"Betty!" said her mother and Florence together.

"There goes Chris!" put in Pauline, who was by the window and had heroically disposed of all of her syrup. Her remark effectually diverted Betty's attention from the possible effects of the refreshments.

"Oh, I want to speak to him!" she cried, setting her plate upon the music-stool, from which she had quickly jumped down, and, hurrying to the front door, she ran out-of-doors, glad to escape from the stifling atmosphere of the crowded parlor.

"Chris, where are you going?" she called out. "Oh, I'm so glad you've come along! We're having the most awful time at a party. I don't think I'll go back. I was going to call you in,

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but it is so nice and fresh outside I am going to stay out. Such a party! We are all eating horrible, hot, sweet stuff that burns your mouth and makes you feel *ill*! What are you going to do? I'll go with you."

Christopher hesitated. Then he said, slowly: "I've been to see George Smith. I heard he was here, and I—I wanted to speak to him."

"What do you want to speak to George Smith about? Chris, you act just as if you had a secret. Is it with George Smith? I think it will be real mean if you don't tell me, too, when we are such intimate friends. You haven't been over for ever so long. I thought you must be mad about something, only I knew there wasn't anything you could possibly be mad with me for."

"Oh no," said Christopher, "I'm not mad with you." He was moving slowly away from her. "I think if you'll excuse me, Betty, I'll go home now."

"That means you don't want me to know it. I think it's very strange. You are certainly quite queer, Chris. You look different. I believe you *are* mad!"

"Oh no, I'm not! Indeed I'm not, Betty."

"Then if you're not, why don't you stay and talk to me? Or we can walk a little way together. I'm perfectly sick of the party and the old maple syrup."

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"Do you think it would be very polite for you to leave?"

"Oh, of course. Mamma and Florence and Pauline are all there. Nobody cares whether I go back. Do tell me what the matter is. You always used to tell me things, Chris. You never have been like this." Her voice, which was usually crisp and high, became softer. She spoke in a gentle tone of sympathy. Her quick intuition had told her that something serious was really troubling the boy.

He glanced at her. He was very fond of Betty, and, as she said, he always had made her his confidante. To be sure, there had never before been anything quite so important to confide, but he knew that she could be trusted not to tell if she promised. With all her high spirits and her heedlessness, Betty Hamilton always kept her promises. Perhaps she would be able to advise him. He had a great respect for her knowledge of the world.

"I believe I will tell you," he said, slowly.

"Good! I knew you would."

But just then Pauline came to Mrs. Martin's front door. "Come in, Betty, and say good-bye," she said. "Mamma says that we are to go home now. Come! Betty, you were awfully rude to run out."

"Oh, bother!" exclaimed Betty. "Well, Chris, will you wait here for me?"

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"No, I can't. I have got to go home. But couldn't you come over to-morrow? Grandfather said I was to ask anybody to come I liked."

"All right, I will, if you'll promise to tell me. Will you?"

"Yes, and that will be better than here. I couldn't tell you about it all here."

This was certainly mysterious, and Betty returned to the party in a state of intense wonder and curiosity. What could be the matter with Chris? But she forgot it temporarily, for such very strange things were taking place in the house.

The guests were all standing, and were evidently about to go. Mrs. Martin was speaking:

"Yes," she said, "I've made up my mind at last and decided to take him. Me and Mr. Tarleton are goin' to be married next week Wednesday. We're goin' to live over to Kingford. He's goin' into business there. I never did care much for Maybury Centre. Lucetta's goin' to buy my half of this house, and Rachel Amy's goin' to live here with her. It suits better, and she can visit to and fro. It's goin' to be a real quiet weddin', but when I get settled over to Kingford I shall be at home certain days, and you can come and call on me. I always did have a hankerin' to live there, and it suits me real well that Mr. Tarleton is goin' into business there."

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The guests gathered about her and gave her their congratulations; then they bade her good-bye.

She shook hands mechanically with each in turn as they filed past her, murmuring that they had enjoyed the four-o'clock very much. They all longed to get home now, that they might discuss the affair in all its bearings. The house with the wire netting and the divided family had been of supreme interest in the village for a year, and this episode but added fuel to the flame of gossip. Mrs. Toppan walked with Mrs. Hamilton to the point where their roads parted. The two had a warm liking for each other.

"Well, it's wonderful how things are turning out. I do hope life will be easier now for that poor girl," said Mrs. Toppan. "Mr. Toppan always said words would do no good now with Liza Martin. You can't change a woman of her age, and there's no use trying. Only the Lord can work miracles, and He seems to be doin' it, but we mortals can't. Poor Rachel Amy! She's had a hard time of it, but a change has come at last."

Mrs. Hamilton glanced at her three daughters, who were walking in front, whose lot was so different. "She seems like such a nice girl. I am very glad for her," she said.

"And she is a nice girl!" said Mrs. Toppan.

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"Next to Chris, I'm more fond of Rachel Amy than any child in Maybury Centre. Of course, no one comes up to Chris. I'm worried about him. He don't seem quite happy. Dear me, I thought when he went to live at Keith Hall and had everything money could do for him he'd be happy enough, but the old gentleman isn't an easy one to live with. Something's going wrong, Mrs. Hamilton. Have you noticed it?"

But Mrs. Hamilton had not seen Christopher lately, so could give no clew to the cause of the change in the boy; and presently they reached the fork in the roads, and Mrs. Toppan hastened home alone.

XIII

CHRISTOPHER, when Betty returned to make the proper farewells to Mrs. Martin, walked slowly along the street. It was a long distance from Keith Hall to the village, and in the heat and dust it had been more than usually fatiguing. For some undefined reason he had not wished to ride his pony. Neither would he ask his grandfather for the use of one of the many carriages. It was not merely because he did not care to have him know where he was going; there was something deeper, more serious than that. He would not ask a favor.

The boy had no one to speak to, no one of whom to seek advice. There are few who can reach a wise decision unaided when our affairs seem complicated, few who are not helped by the mere fact of "talking over" that which is troubling us, and Christopher was still a child, and one who needed the tender compassion of a mother, the wise counsel of a father. He thought more than once of going to Mr. and Mrs. Toppan, and of laying the matter before them; but though they

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were near and dear friends, they were not his kin. The ties of blood relationship were very strongly developed in this boy who, until now, had been so alone. He was too much in sympathy with his grandfather to discuss the proud old man with any one else. He had too much pride himself to acknowledge to the Toppans that General Keith had been unkind, unjust, to ask them if it would be right for him to give up his father's name. Betty Hamilton might be different. She was only a child like himself. Perhaps his grandfather would not mind so much if he only told Betty.

He thought about this in a vague way as he trudged along the sun-baked road. Although it was now late in the afternoon, it was still very hot. There was scarcely a breath of air stirring. The bushes and grass which grew beside the road were gray with dust and parched by lack of rain. Some cows pastured on the other side of the stone wall moved toward the bars, hoping, no doubt, that he had come to lead them home. A little garter-snake wriggled across his path, and the faint rustling in the grass showed where it disappeared. Chris paused a moment to watch its course, but it was soon gone. Just then a carriage turned a bend in the road ahead and approached him. The General himself was driving the fine bay horses, seated on the high box-seat

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with the groom beside him. When he saw Chris he reined in the bays and the man jumped down.

"I thought I should meet you," called out General Keith. "It is too hot for you to be walking so far. Why didn't you ask for a horse, Christopher? What do you mean by walking on a day like this, with the stable full of horses eating their heads off and needing to be exercised? Come, get in. Hawkins, help Mr. Christopher up. Be careful, now."

Christopher made no audible response. Whether he desired it or not, he allowed himself to be assisted to the place beside his grandfather, and the man climbed in behind.

"We will take a little drive now we are out," said the General. "Where have you been? Eh? I can't hear you. Speak louder, my boy. Your old grandfather is getting deaf, and you are so far below me in this trap."

"I have been to the village," repeated Christopher, and then they both became silent. The General intended to question him more closely on their return, but, as he had said, conversation was difficult from his high seat. They met Mrs. Toppan just after she had parted from Mrs. Hamilton. She smiled up at her favorite as she waited beside the road to let the carriage pass.

"I'm glad to see them driving together," she said to herself, heedless of the clouds of dust in

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which she stood while she watched them drive on. "I don't know what it is, but I've had that feeling so strong to-day that something was wrong with the child. Dan'el would say it was all nonsense, and most likely it is, but I felt it all the same. Seeing them together makes me feel better. Dear me! I wish I could look after that child myself! It seems as though I just didn't have enough faith to trust him to the Lord—as if I must put my finger in a pie which it is clear enough the Lord doesn't intend *me* to have the baking of! Well, He knows best, and I know He knows best, but it's hard to settle down quietly to the knowledge. Marthy Toppan, you've got a lot to learn yet! The hardest thing in the world to agree to, though, is to wait and do nothing."

The General and his grandson took a long drive, and when they returned to the village they found that the mail was in. Hawkins went into the post-office and brought out but two letters, which he gave to General Keith. The General thrust them into his pocket, but as soon as he reached home he opened and read them. They were evidently of great importance, for he quite forgot to question Christopher about the afternoon, nor could he talk on any subject during dinner. His mind was completely absorbed by the contents of one of his letters. He took it out and read it

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again as soon as dinner was over. Then he sat on the porch smoking until Christopher went to bed, not playing the violin as usual, nor speaking to the boy. Chris kissed him good-night and went up-stairs, and then the General walked up and down for some time, finally going into the library and seating himself at his desk, where he wrote several letters, quite oblivious to time and to anything which might be occurring within or without the big house.

That evening at about eight o'clock George Smith walked past the Toppan Farm and over the road to Keith Hall. He reached the entrance gates of the great estate a few minutes after General Keith left the piazza and went to his library. George did not approach the front of the house, but went instead to the side, and stood quietly beneath one of the windows. Presently the mosquito frame was gently raised in this window and Christopher leaned out.

"George," he said, in a voice that was scarcely more than a whisper, "are you there?"

"Yes," replied George, "and it's to-morrow. Seven o'clock train. Can you get it?"

"Yes."

"Say, Chris!"

"What?"

"I think you're an awful fool. You'd better not."

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"Yes, I will! I'm going!"

"All right. But I think you're a fool, all the same."

Having delivered himself of this opinion, George walked away as quietly as he had come. At the gate, just as he turned into the road to go back to the village, he met Thomas, who was coming from there himself. They bade each other good-evening, but nothing more was said. Thomas supposed it was some friend of one of the other men. The moon was just rising, and it had been too dark to distinguish clearly who it was. He passed an hour at the stable himself, and then returned to the house.

Christopher, who was still watching from his window, saw Thomas come in the gate, and he hurried back to bed. After lying there quietly for a little while he got up and packed a few things in a bag. The moon was up now and shining right into his room. It was not necessary to have any other light. There was not much to do, and within half an hour he was in bed again, but it was long before he fell asleep.

Dawn came very early these days, and with the first gray streaks in the east he was awake. He must not miss the train. He dressed himself, thinking as he did so of a story he had read of a boy who ran away from home, and who, in the act of departure, carried his shoes in one hand

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and his bag in the other as he crept down-stairs. This boy had dropped his shoes with a great clatter, so Christopher decided to wear his. Very softly he left his room, closing the door as he came out, and very softly he went down the great staircase. It was daylight now, although the sun was not yet up. As he passed the dining-room door the thought of food occurred to him. He had been awake so much that in spite of the excitement of running away he felt hungry. There were some crackers in a china jar on the sideboard and some apples in a dish. He filled his pockets with both, but he did not stop to eat them then. Presently he had opened the side door and was out in the garden. The early morning air was full of the scent of the roses—his grandfather's roses, which they both loved. He was sorry to leave them, and somehow they brought the thought of his grandfather very vividly before him. He could imagine the old man standing among them and wondering what had become of him. He was sorry to leave—the roses.

He turned resolutely away from the garden and walked out of the gate. It would not do to loiter, or he would be seen and questioned by some of the early risers among the men. He considered that he had a perfect right to go if he wished, but he knew that such a departure would arouse

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curiosity, and his grandfather would be told, and would send to have him brought back. He would not come, but it would complicate matters to have some one sent for him.

The boy's sense of duty was in a curious state of indefiniteness. He had never known of his grandfather's existence until one year ago. For several months he had regarded him as almost a stranger, and then, suddenly, without an instant's preparation, he had been taken complete possession of by General Keith. His filial affection, which during his father's lifetime had been devoted naturally to him, was now to be completely reversed, and was expected to be even more entirely bestowed upon a person who, he had just discovered, was unkind to his father—who wished him to be unfaithful to his father's memory by giving up his name. He was a boy of a deeply affectionate and faithful nature. He loved his grandfather, but it was a recent love. That which he felt for the memory of his father was the outcome of the tender love which had surrounded his early childhood. They had been so poor together. Love had been all they owned, but it had made life very sweet. Christopher vaguely resented his father's poverty and his grandfather's wealth. All the love and devotion that he could give now were due the memory of his father, he thought. With this idea he forgot

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that he owed anything to General Keith—that though he might be right in the matter of his name, he had no right to run away from his home.

As he passed the Toppan Farm he almost wished that some of his friends might be at the front of the house. He would like to say good-bye to them and explain that he was going off to earn his living. No one was visible, however, for Mr. Toppan and the men were in the barn, and Mrs. Toppan in the kitchen. Early though it was, he knew that they were all up and at their work. He walked on, although he was getting tired and the station was yet a mile away. He would have liked to rest a minute on the familiar steps of the front porch. He would take a drink of water, however. The old pump was close to the road, and on the top of it was the cup which he had so often filled and emptied. The water was deliciously cool and refreshing, and his long drink revived him. He replaced the cup on the top of the pump, and again shouldering his bag, he walked on. He saw no one on the road until he turned into the main street of the village. The postmaster was sweeping out the store, but he had happened to pick up an undelivered letter that was lying behind a barrel by the door just as Chris passed. This so absorbed his attention that he did not notice the boy at all.

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When Christopher at last reached the station he found it locked up. His watch (the gift of his grandfather on Christmas) told him that it was now only a quarter past five. It would be an hour and three-quarters before the train was due. He curled himself up on the bench that stood on the platform and waited as patiently as he could for George Smith to come.

While he was waiting he had ample time for thought. He remembered that he had asked Betty to come to Keith Hall that morning, and she had promised to do so. He had not expected then to be leaving so soon, for when he saw George yesterday they had spoken of going in a day or two. Something must have occurred to make him shorten his vacation. Chris had a very vague idea of George's duties, and he supposed that a "railroad man" who sold papers had vacations as well as other professional and business men. He was sorry to be so rude to Betty, and no one would be able to explain it, for no one would know what had become of him. He intended to write to his grandfather as soon as he should become established in business. George was to help him to "a job." Until then he expected to live on the money he had with him; this amounted to about eight dollars. He remembered that in the old days his father rarely had that much money in his possession at once.

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It would probably be sufficient, therefore, to provide him with food and lodging for a long time. He looked at his watch again, and found that fifteen minutes had crept slowly by.

He began to wish that he had said good-bye to his grandfather. He might have written it on a paper and slipped it underneath his bedroom door. If he had some paper he would write something now. The station-master was good-natured and a friend of Christopher's, and he would see that it was sent to General Keith. Chris searched his pockets and his bag, and finally found an old letter in his bag which by good luck was already addressed to his grandfather. The envelope would do as it was, and there was a blank page inside the sheet upon which he could write a few words. The letter was one which General Keith had received while they were travelling, in regard to an old violin which he had afterward purchased for his grandson. He had given the letter to Chris to read, and had told him to keep it for the present. Afterward they had looked at and bought the violin. It made Chris feel sad to read this letter. Who would play now with grand? And he himself must do without music for the present. He had not been able to bring his own fiddle, that he had used so long, before he knew his grandfather, for he could not carry so much. Perhaps after awhile, when he had

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made a fortune of his own, he could go and visit his grandfather, who by that time would have forgiven him for running away, and they would resume their old habits of playing together. He found a pencil, and wrote the following note on the inner page:

“DEAR GRANDFATHER,—I am sorry to go without saying good-bye to you, but I have to take the early train, and so there was not much time to write, and I was afraid you would stop me if I told you last night, and I did not know till late last night, after I had gone to bed, that I was going to-day. I think it is better for me to earn my own living, because I don't want to give up father's name. I know you will excuse me please, and I thank you for being so kind to me, and I hope you will get along all right same as you did before you found me. Good-bye.

“Yours truly, your grandson,

“CHRISTOPHER LOVEL.”

He replaced the sheet in the old envelope, which he was able to fasten up, and waited for some one to come to whom he could intrust it.

At last there began to be signs of life at the station. Some “drummers” who had passed the night at the hotel came to take the early train. They looked curiously at the fair-haired, blue-eyed boy on the bench, but they did not speak to him, and he did not notice them nor another stranger who stood near. When Sam Wilson, who

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never allowed a train to pass the Maybury Centre station without his superintendence, arrived upon the scene his surprise at seeing Chris among the waiting passengers was very audibly expressed.

"Why, what are you doin' here at this time, Chris?" he demanded. "Goin' on a journey?"

"Yes," said Christopher.

"Grandpa goin', too?"

"Oh no!"

"Well, I want to know! Whar you goin'?"

"On a journey," said Chris, smiling up at him. "Will you please send this letter to my grandfather?" As he had managed to reseal it, it was not unlike one just received and as yet unopened.

"Who'll I give it to?" asked Wilson. "I guess you don't bank on my walkin' up to Keith Hall and deliverin' it to the old gentleman himself with your compliments?"

"Oh no! Just give it to the man who drives down for the mail this morning. I shall be very much obliged. It's important."

"One you had in your pocket and forgot to give him, I presume?"

Sam's interest in the letter overcame for a time his desire to know Christopher's destination, and then, as something occurred to attract his attention to the group of travelling men, he left the boy, and, stuffing the letter in his pocket, walked over to join them.

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At last George Smith came. He greeted Chris in his usual unenthusiastic manner, quite as though they were in the habit of travelling together every day; and the station now being open and the window of the ticket-office raised for business, Chris went in to buy a ticket. He had just accomplished this, and had returned to the platform to be in readiness for the train which was now almost due, when the Hamiltons' carriage was driven up very hurriedly to the other side of the station. In it were Florence, Betty, the coachman, and two trunks. The two girls jumped out and ran into the station. There was just time to buy a ticket and have the trunks checked when the train arrived.

Betty had risen early for the fun of accompanying her sister to the seven-o'clock train, which Florence was obliged to take in order to make her connections. Full of importance at being the only one of the family to see Florence off, Betty carried the bag and umbrella, and devoted herself wholly to her sister's welfare. She paid little attention to any one else, and did not see Christopher, who stood with George Smith at the other end of the platform and entered the last car. The train began to move, and Betty, vociferously calling and waving her farewells to Florence, stood back to watch it go by. As she did so a man brushed against her and swung himself on to the car that

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Florence was in. She looked up expecting him to apologize, for he had nearly knocked her down in his haste. He turned on the step and glanced at her, and then with an oath that was plainly audible he disappeared within the car. But not before Betty had recognized him. She had a keen eye and a ready memory. She knew very well that the man with the enormous ears and shifty eyes, in spite of the disguise of a newly acquired beard and mustache, was none other than the one with whom she and Christopher had walked in Hoboken. What could he have been doing in Maybury? And where had she recently seen those eyes and ears? And then, just as the last car was passing her, a window was raised and Christopher Lovel leaned out.

"Good-bye, Betty!" he shouted. "I'm sorry I couldn't let you know not to come. Good-bye!"

Betty was too much astonished to speak. Where could he be going? Had General Keith again decided to make one of his sudden journeys? And had Chris seen the man? She waved the handkerchief which had been doing duty for Florence, and as the train, moving now with increased speed, hastened away from Maybury Centre, she could see something white fluttering from a window of the last car.

She went around the corner of the station, and

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was just getting into the carriage when Sam Wilson approached her.

"Say," said he, "I guess it's a little mite easier for you to do an errand for Chris than it is for me. He wants I should get this letter to his grandf'ther. Will you give it to him?"

"Why, wasn't his grandfather with him?" asked Betty. "Who was with him?"

"George Smith."

"Are you sure?"

"Well, young lady, I presume I know the difference between General Keith and George Smith."

"But what has he gone away with George Smith for?"

"That's more'n I know or he'd tell, and I guess, on the whole, as long as you're so surprised, I'll undertake to deliver this here letter myself."

XIV

GENERAL KEITH was not an early riser. Neither was he a man who desired the companionship of others at breakfast. On the contrary, it bored him even to say good-morning, and it was a distinct relief to him to take the first meal of the day in solitary comfort. It frequently happened, therefore, that Christopher, who had learned his grandfather's habits and preferences very quickly, ate his breakfast alone at an earlier hour. It was really about the only period of the day when he could do precisely as he wished, and he usually availed himself of the privilege. So it was not in the least surprising that he did not appear at the breakfast-table; he had probably risen early this fine summer morning, and was now at the stable with his pony or at work in his garden. The boy's absence did not trouble General Keith in the least. He put on his old straw hat, and went out to examine the rose-bushes. A new species of bug was giving him trouble this year, and he entered into a long consultation with the head gardener. That over,

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the coachman wished to speak to him about one of the horses which had mysteriously gone lame, and which required immediate attention from a more skilful practitioner than the local "vet." It was ten o'clock before General Keith had time to wonder where Christopher could be. He was sitting on the piazza awaiting the bringing of the morning mail by the man who every day drove to the village to get it, when it occurred to him that he had not yet seen his grandson. He was just about to send for Thomas to ask where he was when that faithful attendant appeared from within the house.

"Where is Mr. Christopher?" asked the General, quite as if Thomas had him hidden in his pocket ready to be produced on demand. "I wish to speak to him immediately."

"I don't know where he is, General. I haven't seen Mr. Christopher to-day."

"Well, I suppose some one has seen him. At any rate, you can find him. Tell him we will have some music—to come at once."

"Beg pardon, sir, but I can't find him. He ain't nowhere, sir."

"What nonsense is this, Thomas? Do you mean to tell me that the boy is hiding? What *do* you mean? Eh?"

It was evident that the General was fast losing his easily lost temper. Thomas trembled, but

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stood his ground. The boy could not be found, and that there would be an exciting scene with his master he well knew.

"Well, sir, I means just this: he ain't nowhere on the place, Mr. Christopher ain't. He ain't been seen by nobody to-day, and, what's more, he ain't had no breakfast."

"How long have you known this? Why wasn't I told at once?" The General's voice was ominously calm.

"I've come to tell you, sir, as soon as ever I knowed it. I thought Mr. Chris had had his breakfast early and gone off to play or something, same as he always does, but I kinder got uneasy, and a little while ago I went all round looking and couldn't find him nowhere. Then I asked Mrs. Adams, and she hadn't laid eyes on him, and neither had any of the maids, nor anybody else. It might be, sir, if I may make so bold as to suggest it, that he's gone over through the woods to Mr. Hamilton's place."

"Send a man over there at once to find out. The boy ought not to go without asking my permission; but—but— Well, very probably he is there. Another time don't be so slow about finding out his absence, Thomas. This must not occur again. You understand me? It is your business to know where Mr. Christopher is at any moment I may choose to ask."

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"Yes, sir. Very good, sir."

Thomas retired, feeling rather relieved at being dismissed from the presence in so mild a manner. In a short time a groom drove away in the run-about, with instructions to go to Mr. Hamilton's and bring Christopher home.

The carriage had scarcely disappeared over the road when Betty Hamilton, followed by Brownie, approached the house by the path which led from Pringle Farm to Keith Hall through the woods. She had been walking rapidly, and her cheeks were flushed with the heat and her curly hair lay in damp masses about her face. It was another hot day, and she had hurried. She went straight to the front piazza, where she found her friend, the General, as she expected. They had been on terms of cordiality all summer, which had been disturbed only temporarily by the visit to the circus, and Betty was one of the small number of persons who were not afraid of him.

"Good-morning, General Keith," said she.

"Good-morning, Miss Betty. So you have brought home that young scamp. Did he send you ahead to make his excuses? I suppose he has been breakfasting with you."

"If you mean Chris, he hasn't been breakfasting with us at all."

"He hasn't! Well, he doesn't deserve any breakfast. But I don't like his taking such a

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long walk over and back without food. I have sent a man over to your place to bring him back, and now he has missed him. As long as he went he ought to have stayed longer. Why doesn't he come forward like a man? Has he sent you to get his scolding?"

"Chris isn't here, General Keith. I came to ask you where he had gone. He didn't tell me, he just shouted out good-bye as the train was moving. I thought, of course, you were with him till Sam Wilson told me you weren't."

"What do you mean?" demanded General Keith. He sat forward, his eyes fixed eagerly upon Betty, his hands trembling as he grasped the arms of his chair to steady them. "The train moving—what train?"

"Why, the seven o'clock. I went to see Florence off, and we were so late we didn't get there till the train was almost there; and after she got on and it was going I saw Chris."

"You have made a mistake, Miss Betty—a very great mistake. My grandson was not on the train which left Maybury at seven o'clock this morning. Impossible! Preposterous! Perfectly preposterous!"

"Oh, but he was, General Keith! I should think I knew Chris! He saw me before I saw him, and he opened the window and called out good-bye and he was sorry to go without seeing me,

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or something like that. You know I was coming over here this morning to play with him, and he hadn't let me know not to come. I thought you were with him, but they told me afterward you weren't."

"But — but — where has he—where has he gone?" The General's voice shook. He could scarcely control it.

"I don't know. That's just what I came over to find out."

"Was he alone?"

"No," said Betty, slowly, "I don't think he was alone."

"Whom was he with? Speak! Don't keep me waiting like this!"

But still Betty hesitated. She did not want to tell General Keith that Chris had gone away with George Smith. George had formerly borne a bad name in the village. To be sure, that was now a thing of the past, and George had been found to be of respectable family, and at present, according to Christopher and his sister Lucy, was making a fortune; but she remembered the prejudice.

"What do you mean by not answering me, Miss Betty? I insist upon your telling me at once."

"I didn't see who it was," said she, at last. "I didn't see anybody with Chris. I thought you were with him."

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"But why has he gone?" asked the General, forgetting for the moment the identity of his mysterious companion. "And where? Can he have gone to South Maybury? Why didn't he take a horse if he wanted to go to South Maybury? Ah, who is this coming? Oh, it is only Hawkins with the mail, and some one he has picked up."

"It is Sam Wilson," said Betty, watching the approaching carriage. "Sam Wilson can tell you whom Chris was with. He was at the station, too."

The carriage drove up to the steps and Sam Wilson clambered down. The coachman was about to drive around to the back door, where he would deliver the mail to Thomas, who would in turn bring it to his master, when General Keith ordered him to wait. He had recovered his self-possession, and there was no sign of weakness now, as he stood on the upper step and awaited what news the stranger might give him.

"I understand, sir, from this young lady, that you saw my grandson leave Maybury this morning. He omitted to tell me that he was taking a journey. Will you have the goodness to tell me with whom he went?"

All the village stood in awe of General Keith. He was their one "great man," and was respected accordingly. Sam Wilson, describing the inter-

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view later to his intimates, declared that he "was floored, clean floored," whatever that might mean. As he had come expressly to impart the information for which he had just been asked, his embarrassment was somewhat unreasonable. He hesitated, cleared his throat twice, and remained speechless.

"Oh, do hurry up, Mr. Wilson," said Betty, impatiently. "Don't you see we've got to find out quickly about Chris? Where is the letter he gave you?"

"A letter!" exclaimed General Keith. "Do you mean to say you have a letter for me which he gave you? The train, I understand, left Maybury Centre at seven o'clock. It is now"—he opened and closed his watch—"twenty-seven minutes past ten. Will you have the goodness to give me that letter? What excuse can you possibly have for not delivering it earlier?"

"See here, General," drawled Sam Wilson, stung into finding his voice at last, "I ain't no letter-carrier, nor I ain't no errand-boy. I d' know as I hev any call to tramp out here from the village just because a boy of twelve years old chooses to give me a letter *addressed to you*."

"No, I suppose not, I suppose not," said the General, recollecting his old grudge against the slowness of the Northern rustic. "But as you are now here, kindly give me the letter."

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Sam felt in his pockets and finally produced it. The General looked at it in some surprise and with visible disappointment. This was not Christopher's handwriting. He opened it and found it was the old letter about the violin. He tossed it on the ground with a gesture of impatience. The three persons who were curiously watching him were astonished.

"I don't know what the boy means by sending that to me," said he. "Did he give you no message?"

"Not a word."

"And whom was he with?"

"Well," said Sam Wilson, drawling more slowly and more aggravatingly than ever, "he was with a feller that I ain't never cottoned to. Not but what he mightn't be all right; I don't say he ain't. But he's a feller that ain't had many friends up this way, and he ain't likely to unless he gets a tiny mite more what you might call affable. I don't say he ain't honest; I don't say he ain't what you might call straight. But he ain't never been a favorite of mine—no, nor of anybody else's, so far as I can make out. He—"

"Will you have the goodness to tell me," broke in the General—and never had his voice been more chilling and distinct—"the name of this person?"

Sam Wilson again became silent. The icy

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voice of the great man froze the speech on his own lips.

"Oh, goody!" exclaimed Betty, "I'll tell you, General Keith. It was George Smith. Don't you know?—Miss Lucetta Smith's nephew. She lives in the house with the wire netting, only they've taken it down now."

"George Smith!" repeated the General. "Where have I heard the name of George Smith? Did Christopher know him?"

"Oh yes. He is a newsboy on the trains from Boston. Chris knows him quite well. He met him the day you came up. He told me about it."

"So he did. He met him the day we came up." The old man repeated the words vaguely. Then he recollected himself. "Thank you, Miss Betty. And I am also much obliged to you, sir. Hawkins, drive this gentleman back to the village—at once, if you please."

And before the deliberate Sam realized what was happening he was again in the carriage, and was being rapidly taken home without having discovered half the information he had hoped for; but he had enough as it was to arrest the attention of his intimates, who were awaiting him on the porch in front of the store, and before long the departure of Chris was known to most of the residents of Maybury Centre.

Betty and the General, left alone together on

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the steps of the piazza, for a moment did not speak. Then the old man turned slowly and looked down at the little girl.

"Miss Betty," said he, "I beg you to speak to me with perfect candor. You are my grandson's friend. Perhaps, and very probably, you enjoy more of his confidence than I do. Have you any idea of where he has gone?"

"I haven't the least idea, General Keith," said Betty, eagerly. "I never supposed he would do *that*."

Her intonation, the emphasis she laid on the word "*that*," something in her face, caused him to look at her more closely. "Did you have reason to suppose he would do anything? Come, have the goodness to tell me what you do know!"

"Why, I don't really know anything, General Keith, except, of course, we've all noticed something has been the matter with Chris lately. He hasn't been half so—well, so jolly as he used to be. You know he always was so sort of happy. He's been quiet, and kind of worried."

"And why has he been worried? What earthly reason could my grandson have for being worried, I should like to know?" The General was now walking up and down the piazza.

"I suppose—" began Betty, and then she was silent.

"Well, well, you suppose what?"

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"I'm afraid you—you would rather I didn't say."

"What nonsense! Say anything if it will give me the slightest clew to the boy's extraordinary action. Not but what I expect him back by the next train. I do not for a moment imagine that he has gone with any intention of staying overnight. But what do you think he has been anxious about?"

"Well," said Betty, "it was that day when he was over at our house, the day we went to the circus afterward. We were playing Indians and were hiding, and no one knew we were there, and we heard Florence and one of her friends talking, and—and—he didn't like what was said about you and his father and mother. That was the reason we went over to South Maybury. He wanted to go off somewhere."

The General came and stood beside her. "What was said?" His voice was very quiet.

Betty suddenly felt like crying. What could she say? How could she explain the conversation they had overheard? Why did General Keith look so *still*? Instinctively she thrust her hand into his, she felt so very sorry.

"Will you please tell me? Tell me just what the boy heard."

"They told about his father and mother being so poor, and that you hadn't tried to find him

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until it was too late to help them. Of course, it may not have been true. Chris seemed to feel very badly about it. His face got all white and qucer, and he wouldn't play any more. We went to South Maybury, and he seemed to forget it for a little while, but he's never been the same since. He has been sort of—sort of queer. I told him not to mind so much."

"Ah!" said the General. Then, after a moment: "Thank you, Miss Betty. That, and the name, I suppose—that, and the name." He began again to walk up and down. "But without a word to me! To go off even for the day without saying good-bye!"

"Didn't he say good-bye in that letter?" asked Betty, her glance falling on the sheet which, with its envelope, lay upon the grass where it had fluttered in the soft summer breeze.

"Not a word of it. It is a letter written by some one else—an old letter. I can't imagine what he meant by sending that man up here with it."

"May I look at it?"

"Of course. It is only about a violin."

Betty procured the letter, and read the first page carefully. Then she turned it and gave a sudden exclamation. "Here is something from Chris, General Keith! He has written on the inside!"

The General seized the paper and scanned it

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closely. Then he gave it back to her. "Read it to me," he said. "I can't see—something wrong with my glasses—read it to me."

Betty read the note slowly and distinctly. Not a word was said by either when she finished. She glanced timidly at General Keith. Even Betty felt a new timidity. She had never before been in the presence of acute mental suffering. It was several minutes before either spoke. At last the General turned toward the house.

"I must go to get him," he said, slowly. "I must go after my little boy. Thank you, Miss Betty—I thank you very much."

He was about to enter the house when Betty remembered one very important fact which she had not yet communicated to him—at least, her mother thought it was important, and had been very much disturbed when she heard it.

"Wait a minute, General Keith," said Betty. "That man was on the same train with Chris."

"What man?"

"The one who tried to run away with us in Hoboken. That man, don't you know, who came up to us in the Jersey City station!"

"He was on the train this morning!" The General turned and came back to her. He was as much impressed by her announcement as her mother had been. "Was Christopher with him?"

"Oh no! He went into another car. He may

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not even have seen Chris. I shouldn't have seen him if he hadn't almost knocked me down hurrying to get on. I think he must have been late getting there, he was in such a terrible hurry. He was mad because I was in his way, and I was mad, too. He must be a very bad person, for he said an awful swear word."

"Do you think he recognized you?"

"Oh yes, indeed he did! That's the reason he was so furious. And I knew him right away, though he looks different. He has a beard now—a sort of a false-looking, dark beard. And I *think* he's the same man we saw at the circus, only he had a lot of yellow hair then. He was doing tricks."

"Even if he did not see Christopher before he got on the train he will certainly find him there before they go far. I feel very much disturbed by what you have told me, Miss Betty. I cannot help connecting my boy's departure in some way with this man. It is extraordinary that he should have been in Maybury. Why should he come to this out-of-the-way spot unless for some mischief? You say you saw him at the circus?"

"Yes; only I wasn't sure of it then, but I am now. I knew he was the 'Fascinating Fernando,' but Chris didn't notice that he looked like the Hoboken man."

"Do you think he remembered you?"

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"I don't know. He disappeared behind the curtain just as I was watching his face."

Unconsciously the General was consulting with Betty quite as if she were a grown woman. She was not unaware of his attitude, and was much pleased. It always delighted Betty to be treated in this manner. She only wished that Charles and Pauline were there to hear him. They would never believe it unless they heard it themselves. It seemed a direct answer to her wish, therefore, when at that very moment Charles himself drove up the avenue. In the carriage were her mother and Pauline.

"I could not help coming over to see you, General Keith," said Mrs. Hamilton, as they drew up at the steps, "I feel so anxious about that man having been in Maybury. Betty has told you, I suppose. No, I will not get out, thank you. I came to see if—" She paused, not knowing exactly what to say. She as yet knew only the bare fact of Christopher having left home with George Smith, on the same train with a man who had already tried before this to abduct him. She did not know whether or not his grandfather had been aware of the boy's intended journey, but she thought it was highly probable that he had not.

The General finished her sentence for her. "If I knew about Christopher — where Christopher

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has gone? No, Mrs. Hamilton, I do not. At first I was inclined to believe that he had gone to South Maybury or somewhere equally near, but now I do not. I shall go after him at once. I only wish I had some means of identifying that scoundrel. I may pass him twenty times in my search without knowing it."

Betty made a step forward. "Oh!" she exclaimed, impulsively, and looked from the General to her mother, and then at the General again. "Couldn't I — oh, mamma, do you suppose I could? General Keith, couldn't you take me with you? I could help you find him. I should know him right away, just as I did this morning."

"You! Oh, my dear child, I couldn't let you!" cried Mrs. Hamilton.

"Betty!" exclaimed Charles and Pauline together.

But the General did not join in the chorus of disapproval. On the contrary, his face brightened.

"Is it quite out of the question, Mrs. Hamilton?" he asked. "I should take very good care of her, and I should like to have her with me. She would be in no danger. Thomas will be with me and will look after her, and you can send a maid. I believe if we want to secure that man it is the only thing we can do to identify him — and — Mrs. Hamilton, even now he may have succeeded in getting possession of Christopher.

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I beg you to allow me the privilege of Miss Betty's company. I will take very good care of her."

For a moment there was silence, broken only by a little song-sparrow, which was perched on a bush near the porch, and the impatient stamping of the horse on the gravel driveway. Betty gazed imploringly at her mother.

"Do let me, mamma!" she said, at last. "It seems as if we ought to help all we can."

"I cannot say yes without consulting her father," said Mrs. Hamilton, at last. "If you will wait long enough for me to send a telegram and get a reply, I will agree to do as he says."

"I shall be deeply grateful to you, and will willingly wait. It will not be necessary to leave within less than two hours, at any rate," said the General, looking at his watch. "There is nothing more from here until five o'clock this afternoon; but there is a train that passes Kingford at two o'clock, due in Boston at a quarter of four. We are too late now to catch the twelve-fifteen at Kingford. That gets in at one-fifty-five, but we are twenty miles away, and we can't do it in an hour. It is a quarter of eleven now. In the mean time I will send Thomas to the hotel to see if any suspicious character has been staying there. Mrs. Hamilton, if you will lend me Miss Betty for this journey, you will have my undying gratitude and friendship. It may come to nothing. I may

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have lost him again, but you will have helped me."

He turned away, unable to command his voice, and, signing to Betty to get into the carriage, Mrs. Hamilton told Charles to drive quickly to the village that she might telegraph to his father.

XV

IT is probable that Christopher Lovel would never have carried out his half-formed intention of leaving his grandfather's home had not George Smith visited Maybury Centre at just that time. The boy's whole mind and nature were in a state of indecision and unrest, for in addition to the sense of injury which he felt in regard to his father, he had begun to resent, although unconsciously, the lack of independent action which General Keith insisted upon. He was still very childish in many ways, but he was growing older. He wished to be older; he felt an intense desire to assert himself, to act like a man. There seemed to be no surer way of accomplishing this than to run away and earn his own living. It is probable that all boys feel this longing for freedom at times; it is part of their development. In Christopher's case there was much to foster the feeling, little to restrain it.

And just at this critical moment George Smith appeared in Maybury—George Smith, who represented to Christopher the personification of suc-

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cess in the matter of earning one's living at an early age. It seemed most opportune. Chris had seen George in the village on the day of his return to Maybury. He had questioned him closely, and finally had said that he wished to try the same line of work himself. Could George help him to get a place? George had been rather discouraging at first. He had advised him to stay where he was, and had told him that he would "take no hand" in helping him to leave his home. The two boys were in front of the Maybury House, the one hotel of the village, when they had this conversation. Chris was on his pony, and Ben, the groom, had taken the opportunity to seek an acquaintance in the hotel while his young master talked with his friend. When Ben came out he was accompanied by a man who had arrived at the hotel the night before, and who was already popular there. The stranger, who had entered his name as W. Banks, of New York, was apparently an old friend of Ben's. As they stood together on the steps of the hotel Mr. Banks casually asked the name of the "young fellow" who was talking to "young Lovel," and Ben was able to give him the necessary information with much in addition. Mr. Banks watched Christopher and the groom ride away, and then he sauntered up the road in the direction in which George had gone. A few minutes later, as George seemed to be walking

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slowly, he quickened his pace until he had overtaken the boy and greeted him cordially. He asked him a civil question or two about the country, and in a very short time had renewed the acquaintance formed at the circus and which bade fair to become intimate. George had few friends in Maybury, but he was not by nature unsociable. If any one showed a desire to be friendly he was ready to respond, but he was equally quick to resent a fancied slight. The result of their walk together was that Mr. Banks soon learned all that there was to be known about Christopher's wish to leave home and make his fortune, and George's own prospects of the same happy result for himself if he could find the right thing. Was there any chance for him in circus work?

Mr. Banks was apparently of a most optimistic turn of mind. He declared that selling books and papers on the train was a profession that held promise of most desirable results. He himself was deeply interested in "young fellows," and his business now was such that he employed a number. He did not go into particulars as to the nature of his business. He had left the circus himself for something else, and he was at that moment looking out for a boy to do office work. The salary was not much at first, but faithful attention was sure to be rewarded. He had liked

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the looks of young Lovel, and if George chose to do so he could bring him to Boston, and Mr. Banks would interview him there and explain what he needed.

"Better not say anything to him now. If he feels that he'd like train work it might upset him to think about office work till he got there. Just tell him you have a friend who can help him to a place. You needn't mention my name — it's Banks, by-the-way—and if you should see me on the train you needn't say you know me. Kids—little ones—is queer cattle, and he'll be kind of upset, anyway, running away from home. I'll make it all smooth for you if he's the boy I want for my work, as I think he is. You'll get ten per cent. of the deal."

George did not clearly understand this offer, but hesitated to acknowledge an ignorance of which he felt somewhat ashamed. It was evidently an affair of business, a common transaction with which he was expected to be familiar. He certainly would ask no questions that might expose him to ridicule. He was in great fear of ridicule. He agreed, therefore, to everything that was suggested, and when he saw Christopher that afternoon he told him that if he really wished to go, he, George, could help him to "a job." Mr. Banks informed George that same evening that it would be to the advantage of all parties

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if they left Maybury the following morning, so George walked up to Keith Hall and told Christopher, with the result that we have seen. The three left Maybury on the same train, but without the slightest sign of recognition having been exchanged by Mr. Banks and George. It was a distinct shock to Mr. Banks when he encountered the keen eyes of Miss Betty Hamilton, of New York. He saw at once that she remembered him, and he congratulated himself more than once during the journey to Boston that she had not discovered him sooner. It convinced him that he would better accomplish his scheme of abducting Christopher if he kept entirely out of his way for the present. Once get the boy to a large city, and he could easily manage it without danger of discovery. And then it would be a simple matter to make known to the rich old General that a large sum of money would restore to him his grandson. Mr. W. Banks had long cherished this ambition. When he was thwarted in its accomplishment in Hoboken he had by no means acknowledged himself beaten. On the contrary, he became more than ever determined to carry it to a successful finish. He considered it not only an easy but an interesting method of fortune-making—far more attractive than the profession of “clerking” or “counter-jumping” or other humdrum but honest means of livelihood, or the

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more exciting profession of wriggling out of ropes at a circus, and more sure of good results than counterfeiting and safe-smashing, which he had also tried.

"The old man will give at least a million to get the kid back," he said to himself, "and it will be to his interest to keep it dark. I'm a made man this time. It's wonderful how things have just worked right. Smith's an easy one. Everything going as slick and smooth as silk."

But once more Mr. Banks had reckoned without Miss Betty of New York.

Christopher and George Smith, seated together in the rear car of a train that consisted at present of only two passenger coaches and one combination smoking and baggage car, had little to say to each other until some miles of their journey had been travelled. George was not a very talkative person at any time, and Chris, this morning, had so much to occupy his mind that he, too, was very silent. As the train began to move, as it left the familiar Maybury Centre station, and approaching the lake with a shrill shriek for the grade crossing that was to be passed, with rapidly increasing speed rumbled over the trestle and flew along the embankment where Chris and Betty and Lucy Smith had met with an exciting adventure last summer—as he felt himself being carried away from the well-known neighborhood that was

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now his home, out into the big world again, where he had already suffered more pain and hardship than usually come to a boy of his age and station in life, Chris felt a sudden and overwhelming depression. What had he done? Where was he going? And should he ever see his grandfather again—his grandfather, whom he truly loved, in spite of the sense of injury and resentment which had so absorbed his mind during the last few weeks?

Christopher's eyes were full of tears. He longed to get out of the train and go home again. If it would only stop! Instead it rushed faster and faster through miles of woodland. The thick masses of trees but added to his bewilderment and regret. He stared at them through the blinding tears. He wondered if George would notice if he got out his handkerchief to wipe his eyes. He did not wish George to see that he was crying. It was so like a baby to cry, and he intended to be quite grown up now. He must be, if he was to earn his living like a man. He wondered if George ever cried, and then he remembered how he and Betty had met George in the road after Mrs. Smith, his mother died, and he had cried. Leaving home was almost as bad as having somebody die, Chris thought. If his grandfather were to die before he went back? Went back! He was not going back—at least, not for a very long time.

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He resolutely fought down the tears, and after awhile he had succeeded sufficiently for him to turn to George and ask him some questions about the means that he should take to get a position. George answered, evasively. He thought it was about time for Christopher to meet his future employer, but he could not suggest this until he had consulted Mr. Banks. George felt a deep respect for Mr. Banks, and dared not act without his approval. He made some excuse to Christopher—told him he was going forward for a smoke, and left him to stay where he was.

"You're not used to going through the train like I am," said he. "We're making time now. You'd better keep where you are, with your lame leg."

"But if I go into the newspaper and book business, like you, on trains, I'll have to go through them when they're going fast," said Chris. "Wouldn't it be a good idea for me to get used to it and go along with you now?"

"No," said George, decidedly; "you stay where you're put. I ain't going to have no accident on my hands. And maybe you won't do no railroad work. I've heard of something else." And then, fearful that he might be led into imparting more definite information, George hastened "forward," to enjoy the pleasures of a smoke in the society of that fascinating man of the world, Mr. W. Banks.

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That gentleman was not yet ready, apparently, to make the acquaintance of his future office boy.

"Time enough, time enough!" said he, easily. "Kids—little ones—is queer cattle. You take him along with you, and you keep him till I give you the tip. Then you can bring him to my place—to-morrow or next day, it'll be—and we'll fix up everything. Suppose we say to-morrow morning at about ten o'clock."

"But I've got to get to work," objected George. "I've got to find a job, and I guess as long as I've come back I'll try for it right off or I won't find anything. What's the matter with bringin' Chris to your place this afternoon?"

"All right," said Mr. Banks, with his usual affability. It was just what he had planned, but he considered it advisable to let George suggest these things. He had already calculated the length of time that must elapse before General Keith should start in pursuit. From his friend Ben he had learned the breakfast-hour and the daily customs at Keith Hall, and had reasoned that the General could not take the nine o'clock train. He would certainly reach Boston that evening, however, and Banks knew that it would be well to have Christopher in his own keeping before the boy's grandfather could interview Smith. It would be easy enough to leave town with him before the search began.

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So it was arranged that Smith should bring Christopher to a certain address in Boston at three o'clock that afternoon, and that until that time the boy should remain in ignorance of even the existence of Mr. Banks. This settled, George returned to his seat beside Christopher, and Mr. Banks was left to his own reflections.

If any one had happened to be watching him, that person would have quickly reached the conclusion that his reflections were not altogether satisfactory. A sudden thought seemed to come to him that was disturbing. After a little while he drew a package of time-tables from his pocket and began to study them. Then he put them away again and gazed out of the window. At last he seemed to reach a decision. He drew his hat well down over his eyes—it was a soft felt hat, and lent itself easily to a variety of shapes, and with the brim turned down it hid completely the upper part of his face. This done, he rose and walked through the train to the last car. He passed through it without appearing to notice any of the passengers. He went to the door, and stood looking out at the track as the train sped on its way. They would soon reach the junction where additional cars would be taken on. After a few minutes he turned and walked slowly back. As he passed the seat occupied by George and Christopher he put out his hand as if to steady

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himself. In doing so he pressed George's shoulder steadily and significantly. Then he walked on and through to the next car. In a few minutes George followed him.

"You're a bright one," said Banks. He had already discovered that George was susceptible to flattery. "I just thought I'd try you and see if you'd ketch on. Not every feller would have kept as quiet as you did and then follow to see what was wanted. I tell you now, I'll remember this, and if you don't find a job on the railroad—which is what you want and what you're cut out for if ever a feller was—you just come to me and I'll fix you. You're just the sort of feller I'm always looking out for."

"I thought p'r'aps you wanted to say something," said George, much pleased with this praise.

"Well, as long as you're here, I'll say it, but it wasn't so very important. What I did want was to see if you'd ketch on, and I can say you caught—yes, you caught. I'm thinking it would be a little mite easier for us all if we was to meet in the North Station this afternoon instead of your coming way to my place. What's the use of taking your time to come? You're a busy man, just as I am. You bring the kid to the station, or you tell him to come and you'll meet him there. Then you can introduce him to me, and I'll tell him what I've got for him to do,"

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"What's the matter with introducing him now?" asked George. He could not quite understand the necessity for all these elaborate proceedings. It would seem so simple a matter to make all the necessary arrangements on the train.

"Because I find I've got to change at the junction," replied Banks, who had prepared himself for just this question. "I've got business on the other branch, and I won't reach Boston as early as you do. I've got to stop over, and then I'll take the next train. You have the boy at the North Station at 2 P.M. You have him standing by the information office, right there in the big waiting-room. You know it. If you can't be there yourself—I know you're a busy man—you just leave him, or tell him to go there and wait. I'll tell him about his job, and then I'll take him to my place, and he can see how he likes it. Where's the kid going to live, anyhow?"

"He's going shares in my room." George mentioned his address.

"Well, that won't be very convenient, but he may as well begin there and I can fix him later. I have a sort of an idea I'm going to like that kid—take a fancy to him, same as I have to you. That's my way. I take a fancy, and there ain't anything I don't feel like doing for a young feller. Help 'em right along. Well, here's the junction.

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You go back and tell little Lovel all about it, and you have him standing by the information office in the waiting-room at two o'clock sharp."

So George returned to Christopher much pleased to be allowed at last to impart the plans which his kind friend had made for the boy's welfare, and Christopher listened eagerly and agreed to do just as he was directed. And Mr. Banks, much pleased himself with his own cleverness, left the Maybury train at the junction, and after waiting there fifteen minutes, took another train which would get him to Boston half an hour later than the one he left. He would have plenty of time to make all the necessary arrangements for the hiding of Christopher in Boston, or for carrying him to some other place if that seemed more advisable after consultation with a trusted colleague. His study of the time-tables had proved to him that General Keith, even if he started at once in pursuit of his grandson, could not reach Boston until three o'clock. Banks knew all about the two-o'clock train on the other road which the General would probably try to make. He flattered himself that he had allowed for every contingency. But there was one thing which he had forgotten, one possibility which he had omitted to take into consideration, and that was that sometimes the unforeseen happens. And the un-

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foreseen was at that moment "happening" in Maybury Centre.

The Hamiltons had just reached home, a reply from Mr. Hamilton had been received, and preparations were being hurriedly made for Betty and Gertrude to take a journey, when the "honk-honk" of an automobile was heard, and up the steep driveway which led to the old farm-house puffed a big touring-car. There was no one on the piazza when it approached, but the unwonted sounds brought Betty to the window. With a shout of delight she rushed through the house.

"Mamma! Mamma! Aunt Edith and Uncle Lu have come! They're in the motor at the door! Hurrah! Hurrah! Three cheers!"

"I never was so thankful in my life to see you!" cried Mrs. Hamilton, who reached the door almost as soon as Betty did, and was closely followed by Pauline, while Charles came dashing around the side of the house. "Really your coming now seems providential. We didn't expect you for two weeks."

"We changed our plans very unexpectedly," said Mrs. Lewis, unwinding her veils and proceeding to kiss her assembled relatives. "We thought we would come here at the beginning instead of the end of this part of our trip, and it would be fun to take you by surprise. If you haven't room

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for us now we can go to Keith Hall. The General will probably take us in."

"Oh, my dear! The poor General—but do come sit down. Ludovic, I am so thankful to see you! We need your advice and help. Charlie isn't here, and such a strange thing has happened."

"Chris has gone off, Uncle Lu," put in Betty.

"Gone off? When? What do you mean?" Mr. Lewis, who had been deep in the mysteries of the interior of his automobile, straightened himself, and looked from one to the other.

They told him, all speaking at once and interrupting one another, after the manner of a family in which something quite unusual has occurred, but he finally understood what had happened.

"And I am going with General Keith to find him, because I know the man by sight," said Betty. "Gertrude and I. Gertrude is going because we may be gone for some time, and mamma won't let me go without her, but I could get along very well. We are going to drive over to Kingford to take a train. General Keith is going to send for us, but we have to take a slow train instead of a fast one because Kingford is twenty miles away from Keith Hall, and we can't get there in time. Oh, Uncle Lu, I've just thought of a scheme! Why don't you take us over in the motor? We could get that fast train if you did."

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"What time does it leave Kingford?" asked Mr. Lewis, looking at his watch, and then hurriedly resuming his examination of his car.

"Twelve-fifteen."

"And it is now half-past eleven. We'll do it. Quick, Betty!"

Betty was seated in the car with a jacket over her arm, her bag at her feet, and a big veil, which her aunt Edith had just taken off, tied over her head, in almost less time than it takes to tell it; but Gertrude was not so swift in her movements. She was very much averse to taking this unexpected journey, at any rate, and the thought of being whirled away in an automobile to cover more than twenty miles in half an hour was more than she could endure. She expostulated, protested, and lost much valuable time.

"Oh, let Betty go without Gertrude," suggested Mr. Lewis. "Very likely we shall be back to-night. I will look after her, and we can engage a maid at any hotel we may stop at. I shall go with them to Boston, Edith."

"Of course," said Mrs. Lewis. "Really, Bessie, it is all right to let Betty go without Gertrude."

"Very well," said Mrs. Hamilton, "if Ludovic is going."

And then, with hasty farewells, away they went, down the hill and off over the country road, leaving behind them dense clouds of dust, and terrify-

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ing all the old farm horses they chanced to meet. They turned in at the gates of Keith Hall just as the General's carriage, with a pair of his fastest horses, came out of the stable. It did not take long to explain the new situation. General Keith and Thomas stepped into the motor-car, and it dashed away. The road from Maybury to Kingford was a good one for that mountainous region, and if all went well they would arrive in Kingford in plenty of time to put the car up at a garage and take the twelve-fifteen train for Boston.

"I have always disliked these obnoxious machines," said General Keith, leaning forward and raising his voice; "as you know, I have felt very strongly that they were the most dangerous, the most objectionable form which human invention has yet assumed; but I begin to think they have their uses, after all."

Ludovic Lewis did not reply beyond a nod of his head, but Betty, who was sitting beside him, looked up in time to see a smile of satisfaction spread over his handsome face.

"That's one for you, Uncle Lu," she said.

She and her uncle were now the best of friends, although this had not always been the case, and she was delighted that he was to be one of the party to rescue Chris. It was all very exciting, and Betty was immensely pleased with the way things were turning out. A railroad journey,

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an automobile ride at high speed, and jolly Uncle Ludovic instead of strict Gertrude! It was all very fine for Miss Betty. She felt no anxiety about Christopher, being confident that she and her uncle together would be more than a match for the "Fascinating Fernando."

XVI

ALL went well. There were no punctured tires, no breakdowns, no delays of any kind. The big touring-car whirled up to the station at Kingford without having encountered an accident or a constable, its occupants alighted, and while Thomas went in to buy tickets for the party, Mr. Lewis drove to a garage not far away, and then, coming quickly back, joined his uncle and niece just as the train puffed into the station. Kingford was a town of considerable size, with paved streets and brick buildings, and of sufficient importance for all the express trains to stop there. It was on the main line of the railroad and the direct route to Boston, and very soon the travellers were seated in a parlor-car with the satisfactory assurance that they had caught their train and were due to arrive in Boston, without further change, more than two hours earlier than a little while ago they had supposed possible. Another good thing was the fact that Ludovic Lewis was with them. General Keith realized this morning, as he had never done before, that

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he was growing older. He was a good deal shaken by Christopher's hasty and secret departure. He was cut to the quick by it, and now that he had time to think, it was a great comfort to him that Ludovic was there to help and to advise, and to decide quickly in any emergency that might arise. The proud old man, contrary to his usual custom, spoke freely to the younger one.

"I insisted that he should change his name, Ludovic. I shouldn't have done that. Nobody could have induced me to give up my own name. I should have remembered that. And then the boy heard something. He heard that—that I couldn't forgive Emily. He doesn't know how deeply I have regretted my harshness. I was younger then, and my nature was more bitter, harder, sterner. Now I see things in another light, and my little boy has unconsciously taught me how we ought to live — in peace and good will with all, even with those who have wronged us. But there was something to be said on both sides, Ludovic."

"Of course, uncle. There always is."

"But I am not excusing myself. She was my daughter, and I should have forgiven her. I intended atoning for it with her boy, and now he has gone away."

"We shall find him, and before night. Don't worry, uncle. It will all come out right." And

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privately Ludovic wondered to see how his cold, proud uncle had softened, and he pitied him the more, for it showed what he was suffering.

The train was on time, and precisely at ten minutes of two it glided into the Boston terminal. As the party walked quickly along the station platform, Betty between General Keith and her uncle, and Thomas and a porter following with the bags and wraps, two men who were waiting near the exit moved forward a few steps. Mr. Lewis stopped and spoke to them, and after a brief conversation they parted again. He rejoined his family, and they mingled with the crowd that entered the waiting-room.

"The detectives I telegraphed for, uncle," said Ludovic. "They advise us to work very carefully—first to hunt up George Smith, and see if Chris is with him. If he is not, we are to discover in some way whether Betty's Hoboken friend has had a hand in it. He may not have, you know. That may have been merely a coincidence. Suppose we go into the waiting-room for a few minutes. You and Betty can sit there while I find out something about Smith. As he is a news-boy on the trains, he will be coming into the station sooner or later, and we perhaps can get him more quickly than by going to the address that Thomas got from the aunt in Maybury. He wouldn't be there until night. We will go sit

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down, and then one of the detectives is coming to join us, so that Betty can give him an exact description of her Hoboken friend, both the way he looked then and as he does now."

They had entered the large waiting-room, and soon found seats. Betty did as she was told, and described with great exactness the past and present aspect of Mr. Banks, although she did not know him by that name. They were seated in a row not very far from the information office, which was a booth almost in the centre of the room. At times a long line of persons awaited their turn to ask for "information" regarding the trains, at other times no one was at the window. The detective was standing in front of Betty. As she turned from him to answer a question of General Keith's, she gave an exclamation and started to her feet.

"There he is! There's—"

"Sit right down!" commanded the detective.

"Don't show yourself."

"But it's Chris himself!" said Betty, reluctantly obeying him.

"Never mind. All the better. Tell me where without looking that way."

"Chris himself?" repeated General Keith. He also attempted to rise.

"You must keep quiet," said the detective, whose name was Taylor. "I believe this is all

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a carefully laid scheme to abduct your grandson, General Keith, by the same man who, from what this young lady tells me, tried to do it before. It will be to your future advantage to have him shut up, or he will be after him again, so we must get him this time. Now, young lady, tell me, without looking at him, where the boy is."

"He's standing by that place where people go to ask questions. He's got his back turned to us. I don't believe he has seen us at all."

"So much the better." Taylor had been talking in a low voice, but without any appearance of mystery. He now glanced about the waiting-room without allowing his eyes to rest longer in one place than another.

"A slight boy with light hair? Wears a little gray cap?"

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed the General. "There he is. I see him myself."

The line had moved on from the information office, and Chris now stood there alone. He was gazing toward the doors which opened upon the street. The ever-changing throng within the station made but little impression upon him. He had been told that Banks would be in Boston, and would join him soon after two o'clock and take him to his office, which was not far away. He therefore directed his attention entirely to

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the doors by which a man already in the city would naturally enter.

"He is evidently waiting for some one," said Ludovic. "I think Mr. Taylor is right, uncle. We want to make sure of that man this time. If it proves to be Smith who comes for Chris no harm will be done. If it isn't—"

"There's somebody now!" exclaimed Betty. "And it isn't either of them."

A man had walked up to Christopher and said something to him. The boy answered, and appeared to be questioning the new-comer. He still stood with his back toward his friends, who were all eagerly watching. Then he stooped, picked up his bag, which he had placed upon the floor, and walked away with the stranger toward the door of the station.

"Come," said the detective. He walked in front, with Mr. Lewis, Betty, and the General close behind. They quickened their footsteps, so that by the time Christopher and his companion reached the sidewalk they were very near.

"I'll give you a nice automobile ride," they heard the man say.

"Is it far to the office?" asked Christopher.

"Quite a little way, but you won't mind that. This way." His guide led him along the sidewalk toward the end of the big station. An automobile was drawn up at the curbstone. The man

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in the chauffeur's seat, in a soft hat drawn well down over his face, looked neither to the right nor the left as they approached. Betty was now walking beside her uncle. She glanced curiously at the automobile and at the chauffeur.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Quick! There he is—Hoboken man—in the motor!"

Taylor signed to the party to wait. He moved quickly forward, joined by the other officer, who appeared from some other quarter. A policeman stood on the corner. Christopher's companion opened the door of the automobile. "In with you!" he said. Still the chauffeur did not look up.

Christopher's foot was on the step when he felt himself picked up by some one behind him, who took him by the arms, lifted him high in the air, and then set him down on the pavement again several paces away. He looked up in bewilderment, to find himself standing by his grandfather, with his cousin Ludovic, who had carried him, close behind him. He was too much amazed to say a word. He looked at the automobile. Two men had jumped into it, and two policemen stood beside it.

"They've got him!" exclaimed Betty. "The Hoboken man, Chris, the 'Fascinating Fernando.' They've got him tight. Oh, I hope they'll hold on to him and not let him wriggle

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away from them! They ought to know how well he wriggles!"

"Why, Betty! Are you here?" Chris turned and looked at her. "What does it all mean? How did you get here? And—and—" He turned again and looked at his grandfather, who had not spoken a word. "Oh, grand, dear grand, did you come after me? Oh, I am so glad! And I'm sorry I did it. I'm so glad to see you again."

Still the General said nothing, but he held out his hand. Christopher took it in his own. It was long before he would let it go. Clinging to his arm, they walked back into the waiting-room.

Presently Ludovic Lewis joined them.

"Well, Betty," said he, "you have done some good work! If it hadn't been for you, we shouldn't have managed it all so easily and neatly. With your aid the detectives have nabbed a man they have been after for some time—a man who is wanted for making counterfeit money, and writing some one else's name, and a few other charming little affairs. It seems he has been in prison in New York until last spring, and was wanted in Boston for something he did here after he got out, but he has kept carefully out of the way until to-day. In his desire to make a fortune out of uncle he walked right into the trap. He will be shut up now, uncle, for a sufficient number of

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years for Chris to grow up and be able to take care of himself."

"What does it all mean?" asked Christopher. "Was that man trying to run away with me again?"

"That is just what he was doing. He evidently visited Maybury for no other purpose."

"But I hadn't seen him before," said Chris. "I came away with Geor—I didn't come with that man."

"You came with George Smith," said Betty, finishing the sentence for him. "You needn't think we don't know that. And if George is a friend of that Hoboken man, I don't think much of him. And, Chris, I'm sure he was 'Fascinating Fernando' at the circus. I couldn't think whom he reminded me of at the time, but now I'm sure. Why, Chris, I don't see how you could help recognizing that man. He has such queer big ears and such jiggly eyes. They go jumping about so, and never look at you. I knew him the minute I saw him at Maybury this morning, even though he did have on that queer-looking beard."

"Was he really at Maybury?"

"Yes, and left there on your train."

"Uncle, we can get back to-night," said Ludovic, "and I think it would be advisable, don't you? If we are wanted in court we can

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come to Boston again. There is a train somewhere around four o'clock. In the mean time, wouldn't it be well to get something to eat? Those sandwiches we had on the road were not altogether filling."

He thought it was time to create a diversion, for Christopher's face showed marks of fatigue. He had been through a long day of excitement which had begun at a very early hour, and he had had but little food. Ludovic did not know all this, but his keen, kind eyes detected the boy's exhaustion. And presently, when they were all seated at table, he kept them laughing with his absurd remarks and high spirits until they had forgotten for a time the events which had led to the journey to Boston. He knew that General Keith had been very much affected by all this, and that the narrow escape of his grandson from grave danger had made a profound impression upon the old man. Ludovic determined to have a conversation with Christopher himself. He felt that he could speak to him more clearly and forcibly, and with greater effect, perhaps, than could the General. It was very plain that the boy did not in the least realize his duty to his grandfather. But all this must be deferred until they were safely back in Maybury.

Chris did not talk much while they were at table. It was evident that he was thinking deep-

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ly, that something was troubling him which was not the sense of his narrow escape. Ludovic's impression was justified when the boy came to his side as they left the restaurant.

"Cousin Ludovic," he said, "I want to speak to you. I would rather no one else heard."

"All right, Chris. We'll manage it. We will go buy some fruit to take up to Maybury. There is a fruit store not very far from the station. That will give us a chance to talk. Uncle," he said, raising his voice, "if you and Betty will go sit down in the waiting-room for a few minutes, Chris and I will make some purchases we want for our relatives in Maybury."

"Oh, let me go with you!" exclaimed Betty.

"I cannot think of allowing Christopher out of my sight now," protested General Keith.

"Why, Christopher has never been so safe as he is at this minute, uncle. He could probably go all over Boston alone, now that his particular friend from Hoboken is safely stowed away in the patrol wagon with three stout policemen to guard him. And I think you can trust him with me, sir."

"Of course I can. I spoke without thinking."

"But you will stay with the General, Betty. We don't want to leave him all alone, and Thomas is off somewhere. Yes, Betty, please do as I ask."

So Betty sat down beside the General with as

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good a grace as possible in the face of a disinclination to do what she was requested. It was very poky to sit by the taciturn General when jolly Uncle Lu was taking Chris on a private expedition to the shops.

"We shall not be gone long," said Ludovic. "Only across the way to buy peaches. You're a peach yourself, Betty. You don't need to buy any."

"Uncle Lu! Well, I'll stay, only I'd rather eat one than be one."

"We'll bring you some. Come along, Chris. Now, old man," he added, as they walked away, "what do you want to say to me?"

"It is about George Smith. I don't believe he really had anything to do with that man trying to steal me. I don't want him punished, and I'm afraid grandfather will. I know he's feeling very angry with George. It was all my own fault that I left Maybury—I mean it was my own plan. George advised me not to go. Only last night, when he came up to tell me we were to start this morning, he didn't want me to come; but I wanted to earn my own living, just the way he is doing. I don't think he even knows the Hoboken man."

"Are you quite sure he doesn't? Was George with you all the time on the train? Didn't he leave you at all?"

"Why, yes, he didn't stay with me all the time.

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He went into the smoking-car without me. He said I had better not go through the train while it was going so fast."

"And was not he the one who directed you to stand by the information office to meet the man who promised to employ you?"

"Yes, he was. But, oh, I don't want to believe George tried to have me stolen."

"No, I don't suppose you do. It is not a pleasant experience to find that persons we supposed were our good friends have proved that they could not be trusted; but it sometimes happens, all the same. I think we shall have to find out just how much George has had to do with this business. If you will trust me to manage it, Chris, I think I can. I shall have to come to Boston in the course of a day or two about this other man. They will want me for a witness, I suppose, and then I can see George and get at the truth. You can depend upon me, old man. If there's any good in George at all, I'll try and hunt it up. If there isn't, if he's a pretty bad lot, why, it will be as well for you to know it. Will you leave it to me?"

"Of course I will, Cousin Ludovic. But you tell him, won't you, that I don't think he meant any harm?"

"Yes, I'll tell him. And now tell me what you think of these peaches. Are they good

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enough for your cousin Edith and Mrs. Hamilton?"

"I don't think they are," returned Chris, promptly.

They had crossed the crowded street and entered the little shop. The elevated trains, the subway cars, the heavy drays, the carriages and automobiles united to make a deafening roar, and it was necessary to raise their voices to be heard. The hot summer sun beat down upon the city street, but at that very instant a subtle change crept into the atmosphere. A salt smell mingled with the odor of decaying fruit and dust and smoke, a cool air brought vigor and refreshment. An east wind had sprung up, and wilted humanity, refreshed and invigorated, moved more briskly and thought more clearly and rejoiced in the relief, for it had been a very hot day.

Ludovic and Christopher soon found some fruit that was more to their liking, and then they returned to the station, having also provided themselves with a basket of peaches and pears especially for Betty—and also a large box of candy, which was even more pleasing to the young lady in question. And presently they were all seated in the train and were hurrying as fast as steam could carry them back to old Maybury, which they had all left that morning under such different circumstances.

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Telegrams had been sent before them, and the anxiety of those left at home had been relieved as quickly as possible. Naturally the news of Christopher's departure had spread quickly through the village, for it had rested with Sam Wilson to make it known. Gossip did not linger long in his keeping. His was a generous soul in that respect, and he no sooner heard a piece of news than he imparted it to his neighbor. The tale of his call at Keith Hall had been told with twenty variations before twelve o'clock. When the telegrams began to arrive, hot though the day was, the village assumed an aspect of unwonted activity for the hour. The station master, who was also the telegraph operator, and whose name was "Jabe" Tarleton, lost no time in spreading the news of the rescue. He had never felt the necessity for privacy in the matter of telegraphic communication.

"Gosh!" said he, "what's the use? If a feller talks by wire he's got to expect some other fellow to know what he's talkin' about. Same as postal-cards. Postal-cards is public property. And telephones. If the telephone ever gets put up in Maybury Centre, and I hope it will, I'll feel I hev the right to set down and listen to whoever happens to be talkin' on the line I happen to hev in my house. It's one of the chances we've all got to take, and we're all born equal."

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These being his openly expressed sentiments, it surprised no one when he informed the waiting village that Chris had been found, the scoundrel caught, and the party was to return that evening. It would have been a keen disappointment to every one had he not told it. As to the "scoundrel," that, they all decided, was George Smith. No one had ever liked George. He had borne a bad name from his first appearance in Maybury Centre, when his mother took the old house down the lane beyond Toppan Farm. No special act of wrong-doing had ever been traced to George, no one could have explained the origin of his unsavory reputation. It had taken root and grown, fostered at first by his extreme poverty and shabby appearance. When it was found that he was the nephew of Lucetta Smith, who was greatly loved, there were many who for her sake were inclined to overlook the past; but George himself could not forget it, and he had no friendly feelings toward the people of Maybury. He refused to respond, therefore, to their belated advances, and he thus made himself more unpopular than ever. And now something had occurred which caused them all to shake their heads and say, "I told you so!"

As may be supposed, a number of persons gathered at the little station to watch the arrival of the train from Boston, and those who did not

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come to the station were seated on the front piazzas of their houses. But all in vain. The train arrived, but the only persons to leave it were one or two local travellers. What could have happened? And the General was evidently not expected, for no carriage had been sent to meet him. Jabe had certainly made a great mistake.

And the mystery was not cleared up until the automobile of "that New York feller" dashed through the village an hour later, having left the General and his grandson at Keith Hall on its way from Kingford, and containing only Mr. Lewis himself and his niece Betty Hamilton.

XVII

“GOOD-NIGHT, my boy,” said General Keith. He spoke quietly, and his face betrayed no emotion. His voice shook slightly. They had finished dinner, which had been eaten with the usual attendant formalities. There had been little conversation, but Christopher had been so silent of late that this was not particularly noticeable. There was nothing to mark the fact that the day had been remarkable, that the two who sat so quietly at either end of the table had since sunrise passed through many emotions and extremes of feeling. The sun was setting now, a great ball of red in a cloudless west.

“We shall have another hot day to-morrow,” observed the General, walking to the window. Then he turned to Christopher. “You had better go to bed now. You are tired.”

Chris slipped his hand into his grandfather’s, and together they walked to the foot of the stairs. When the General said good-night, Chris let go his hand without a word. He mounted two steps. Then he turned and looked into his

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grandfather's face, with which his own was now on a level.

"Grand," he said, in a whisper, "can I kiss you?"

"Of course, Christopher. Do you need to ask permission?"

"I didn't know. I wasn't sure. Grand, I'm sorry I did it."

"So am I."

"I'm sorry because it worried you, but—"

"We'll have no 'buts' to-night, Christopher. We are both tired."

There was a moment's silence. They stood facing each other with a long, straight gaze, the blue eyes of the boy looking into the dark but faded eyes of the old man. Then Christopher threw his arms about his grandfather's neck and kissed him, and without a word he went upstairs. General Keith stood watching him. At the top the boy turned and looked down.

"Good-night, grand," he called.

"Good-night, boy."

The boy was soon asleep, but the man's eyes did not close until almost morning. All the evening he walked up and down the library, or moved restlessly from one room to another. He could not read, he could only think, and when at last he went to bed, still he could only think.

The next day at an early hour Ludovic Lewis

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came to his uncle's house in his automobile and invited Chris to take a ride. The General was still sitting at the breakfast-table, but Chris was at the stable. He was very glad to see Sassafras again. Ben, who had looked after the horse, had left suddenly the day before. The coachman was very much disturbed by his departure. It made him one man short, and such things were very "upsetting." Ben's popularity had waned considerable in consequence. Chris was being told about it when he heard the tooting of the automobile horn and ran up to the house to see if his cousin had come. Very soon, the General's permission having been obtained, the two were gliding out of the big gates and on their way to South Maybury."

"I want to have a talk with you, Chris," said Mr. Lewis, "and that is the reason I didn't bring Betty or any one else, though I think Miss Betty would have liked very much to come. But I knew this would be the only way to see you alone, and there are one or two things, my boy, that I want to say to you. First of all, will you tell me something? Will you tell me what on earth made you run away yesterday? Just start in, and tell me from the beginning. What made you do it?"

Ludovic Lewis was one of those rare persons who, by a fine, wide charity, see good in all man-

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kind, and therefore are in turn trusted by all mankind. Saints and sinners alike, we have all one trait in common: we respond to those who trust us, to those who have faith in us we try, although perhaps but feebly, to justify that faith, to be worthy of it. And we love the person who believes in us. Ludovic, with his generous nature, his keen sense of humor, his charm of manner, was loved by all who knew him, and there was no one more wholly devoted to him than his cousin Christopher, who looked up to him and admired him with all the ardor that a boy can feel for a young man. There was, therefore, no one more fitted to advise him, and no one to whom he would be more willing to open his heart.

For a few minutes after Ludovic asked the question there was no reply. He turned and looked down at the childish face and saw that an answer was coming presently. Then he devoted himself to the machine and waited.

"I went because I thought I ought to," said Chris, at last. "And I'm going again."

"What do you mean by that?" His cousin's voice was stern. "Have you no regard whatever for your grandfather? Don't you love him at all?"

"Why, of course I love him, Cousin Ludovic! I love him dearly."

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"Don't you feel the least regret for having given him so much anxiety yesterday? Do you realize the danger you were in? Haven't you the slightest feeling of gratitude at being saved from what might have proved a very terrible fate?"

"Of course, Cousin Ludovic; but you don't seem to understand. I ran away because grandfather wanted me to give up father's name, and he wasn't kind to father, and so I think I ought to make my own living, and not take grandfather's money or have him support me. If I were very little it might be different, but I am big enough now to work. That's the reason I went. I didn't know that man was going to be around again and get hold of me. You see, he thought I was a rich boy, I suppose. He didn't know that really I'm a very poor boy. But now he's caught and there's no danger from him, so I shall be quite safe. I won't go away next time without telling grandfather. I will tell him just what I am going to do, and explain why I am going. I see now it was wrong not to have explained."

"See here, Chris," said Ludovic, speaking more gently than he did before, "I think things are all twisted in your mind. I suppose you have been thinking so hard that you're what Betty would call 'all mixed up,' and I want to see if we can't straighten you out a bit. You seem

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to suppose that your only duty in life is to resent the wrong that was done to your father and to earn your own living. Now I think your duty is very different. Shall I tell you what I think?"

"Yes."

"Well, I think your duty is to the living and not to the dead. By that I don't mean that you ought to try to forget your father, but you ought to try to forget any wrong that was done him if the person who did it is sorry about it, and that your grandfather most certainly is. As to the name, I agree with you. I should not give up my father's name for any amount of money. I think you are right there, and I am quite sure my uncle is not going to urge it any more; in fact, he told me so, so that need not come into the discussion at all. We will put that right out of our minds. But you have a big duty which you don't seem to see. You have but one near relative in the world, and he is an old man who loves you very dearly. You want to leave him to a solitary and sorrowful old age, just so that you can carry out your idea of being independent. We can't all be independent. Most of us would like to, but most of us have ties and claims of some kind that must be attended to. Your grandfather is yours. Remember what a lonely little chap you were this time last year! Your

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cousin Edith has told me how you used to long for relations of your own."

"I know," said Chris, in a low voice.

"And there is still another point. You have no right to shirk the responsibility of your grandfather's money. It is right and proper, by the law of every civilized country, that you should inherit your grandfather's money. At the same time, it is up to you to learn how to take care of it—how to do good with it. Do you think you are going to learn how to be a good millionaire if you should spend your boyhood selling papers or blacking boots or running errands? There are good newsboys and good bootblacks and good errand boys, and I honor and respect all boys who make an honest living in those ways, but I shouldn't honor and respect a boy who shirked larger duties and responsibilities for the sake of having his own way and doing as he liked. When the money finally came to you, you would be ignorant, inexperienced, totally unfitted in every respect to take care of it. Instead of being ready to help the world on to something better by wisely administering a large fortune, you would have grown up ignorant and self-willed and useless for the position you will be called upon to fill. Now I don't believe this side of it has occurred to you at all. I want you to think it all over. And, above all, don't forget

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the duty of loving. And love means a lot, Chris. It means more than just affection. It means a large comprehension, an understanding heart. If you love your grandfather in the way you should love him you will understand him, and if you love your fellow-men you will understand them, and in time you will have the chance to help them. Here we are at South Maybury, and I'll stop preaching. Now we'll do some shopping again. Let's get something very nice for Betty."

They found a gift for Betty at the jewellers'. Chris discovered it himself, and declared that there was nothing else in South Maybury that would do as well, and he purchased it forthwith, being obliged to borrow some money of his cousin to do it, for he had not come prepared to do such extensive shopping. It was a little gold locket in the shape of a heart, and Ludovic made it complete by adding a fine gold chain upon which to wear it. It was great fun, Chris thought, to choose these articles, and of the greatest importance to decide properly as to the relative merits of the different sizes and styles. At last this was accomplished, and while the box was being wrapped up his attentive gaze wandered over the other things displayed for sale. They were about to leave the shop when Chris paused and looked back.

"Cousin Ludovic," he said, and hesitated.

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"What is it now, Chris?"

"Do you think grandfather would think it silly if I got him a present?"

"Why, no, of course not. I am sure he would like it."

"Do you, really? Well, there's something I'd like to get. It's got some words on it, and I thought if I gave it to him and he read the words he'd understand without my saying anything."

"Of course he would. That is a very good idea. Let's see what it is."

They returned to the show-case, and Christopher requested the man to let him see a case of rings at which he had been looking through the glass while they waited. They were exceedingly ugly rings, Ludovic thought, privately; but their value to Chris lay in the fact that each one was in the form of a shield. On the shield was an initial, and under the initial the words "Je t'aimé." They were evidently intended for engagement rings. It was difficult for Chris to decide whether the proper initial to choose should be B for Baldwin or K for Keith. He finally decided upon the latter as being more appropriate, "because grand is so fond of the name of Keith," he explained.

"Do you think he will wear a ring?" suggested Ludovic, not wishing to interfere, but at the same time wondering what effect such a bit of jewelry

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might have upon his fastidious uncle, whose taste in dress was severely simple.

"I think he will if I ask him to," said Christopher, with the child's faith in his own power. The rings were all of the same size, so that question did not trouble him, and very soon another box was tied up, and with the two precious little packages in his pocket they were speeding homeward.

They did not talk much. Ludovic felt that he had said enough, for he saw that his words had taken root, and he hoped would bear good fruit. Chris was thinking deeply. They were almost at Pringle Farm when he turned suddenly and asked a question.

"Cousin Lu," he said, "is it right for some people to have such lots and lots of money when others haven't got any? Oughtn't we to divide up?"

Ludovic was silent for a moment. Then he said: "That question has been asked and thought about almost since history began, old chap. Dividing up doesn't seem to help matters much, human beings being what they are, for the money can't or won't stay divided. There is so much to affect the matter: superior ability, intelligence, certain talents, education—oh, it is a huge subject! But you can do a lot of good with a large fortune if you wish to, Chris, and I hope you will do it. That is one way of 'dividing up.'"



"I SHALL ALWAYS WEAR IT ALL MY LIFE LONG," SHE SAID"

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And then they turned in at the gates of Pringle Farm, for the locket must be given to Betty before Chris went home.

Of course, Betty was delighted. The chain was fastened around her neck at once, and the little gold heart looked very well on her blue gingham frock.

"I shall always wear it all my life long," she said. "Pauline has a round locket my aunt gave her, but it isn't nearly as pretty as this. Weren't you two people nice to get me such lovely presents! Was it just because I knew the man from Hoboken yesterday?"

"Oh no," said Chris, gravely, before his cousin could speak. "We got them for you because you're the nicest girl we know. That's the reason people give presents."

"Do you really like me better than you do Rachel Amy?" asked Betty, greatly pleased with his reply, but, womanlike, not quite satisfied, and insisting upon pushing the inquiry as far as possible.

"Why, how funny you are, Betty! I should think you'd know. I like Rachel Amy ever and ever so much, but you're a sort of a relation. Of course, we think you're the nicest girl we know. Don't we, Cousin Lu?"

"Of course."

"If it's just because I'm a relation—" she began.

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"Oh, you silly!" exclaimed Christopher. "It isn't. It's because you're just Betty. I couldn't possibly ever like any girl as much as I do you, because—why, because you're Betty Hamilton, and there couldn't possibly be another girl like you."

"All right," said Betty, satisfied at last; "then I'll always be very careful of the locket and never lose it and treasure it forever." Which promise was faithfully kept through all of Betty's life.

"That important matter being settled, you may as well jump in, Betty. We'll take Chris home," said her uncle, and Betty promptly jumped in.

That afternoon Mr. Lewis went to Boston again. He was gone for several days; but when he returned, he reported that matters were progressing satisfactorily. Banks was in jail awaiting trial; and as there was positive proof of various offences that he had committed, he would certainly be sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. George Smith had been seen and interviewed, and there was no doubt in Ludovic's mind of his being perfectly innocent in the matter of the attempted stealing of Christopher. He had been so anxious to know what had become of the boy, so relieved to hear that he was at home again, and so unmistakably disgusted with himself for having been deceived so easily by the accomplished Banks, that Ludovic was quite sure that he had been entirely ignorant of what he was doing.

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This opinion of George Smith was shared by all of Christopher's immediate friends, but the people of Maybury Centre were not convinced. The story had soon gained ground that Smith had come back to Maybury when he did for the sole purpose of assisting Banks.

"I tell yer," exclaimed Sam Wilson, "I seen the thing from the first. Yer can't fool me. George Smith was at the bottom of the whole thing. I'm real sorry for Lucetta and that little Lucy. George is a bad lot."

In which opinion his intimates concurred. It was a clear case of "once give a dog a bad name," and it was years before George Smith, by working steadily and industriously, succeeded in overcoming the prejudice against him which was so strong in Maybury Centre. He was not there very often, but he came occasionally to see his sister, who, with their cousin Rachel Amy, shared the affections and the home of their aunt Lucetta, for Mrs. Martin united her fortune with that of Timothy Tarleton and went to live in Kingford. Christopher Lovel never again attempted to run away from home. He settled it definitely with his grandfather the evening of the day after his first and only expedition in search of an independent life.

The day had been passed much as usual. When Chris returned from the trip to South Maybury

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the General suggested an hour's music. Then came luncheon, and then the usual afternoon rest which the General invariably indulged in. After that a ride on horseback. They had returned from the ride and were awaiting dinner when Chris finally made up his mind to speak to his grandfather. All day he had been trying to screw up sufficient courage to open the subject. He knew that his grandfather intended that he should speak first.

"Grand," he said, suddenly rising and standing beside him, "please excuse me for going off. I oughtn't to. I won't again."

"That's right, boy."

"And, grand—"

"What is it, boy?"

The General fully expected to hear something now in regard to the change of name, but Christopher had no intention of driving a bargain; in fact, such a thought never occurred to him. He was fumbling in his pockets. At last, after producing various treasures, such as a bunch of string, a knife, a curious pebble, and other articles of a similar nature, he drew forth the little box.

"I got you something over in South Maybury," he said.

"You got me something? A present, you mean?"

"Yes, grand. I—I want you please to wear it.

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It's a ring," he announced. Then anxiously: "Do you think it will fit? Try it on."

General Keith did as he was commanded. He had never worn a ring in his life, and he had never seen one which was quite so hideous as this. It fitted exactly his little finger.

"It does fit!" exclaimed Chris, joyfully. "And do you see what's on it? Put on your glasses, grand."

General Keith put on his glasses. "Ah," said he. "I see. That is very nice, Christopher. I'm—I'm glad to have it."

"And will you wear the ring? Because you know I'd like to have you remember that, and the ring will remind you."

"There's no danger of my forgetting, but I will wear the ring."

"Good!" said Christopher. "I'm glad it fits so well. And you see it has a K on it. That's for Keith."

The old man looked at it again. Then he put his arm around his grandson and drew him closer to him.

"Boy," said he, "don't worry. Your name shall always begin with an L. And we will agree, you and I, to let bygones be bygones."

THE END

